



TANGLED UP
IN BEULAH
LAND

J. P. MOWBRAY



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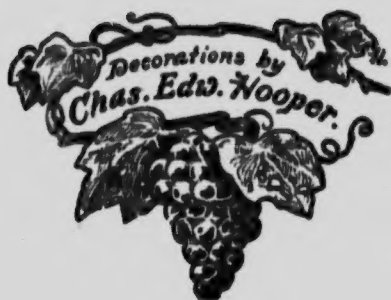
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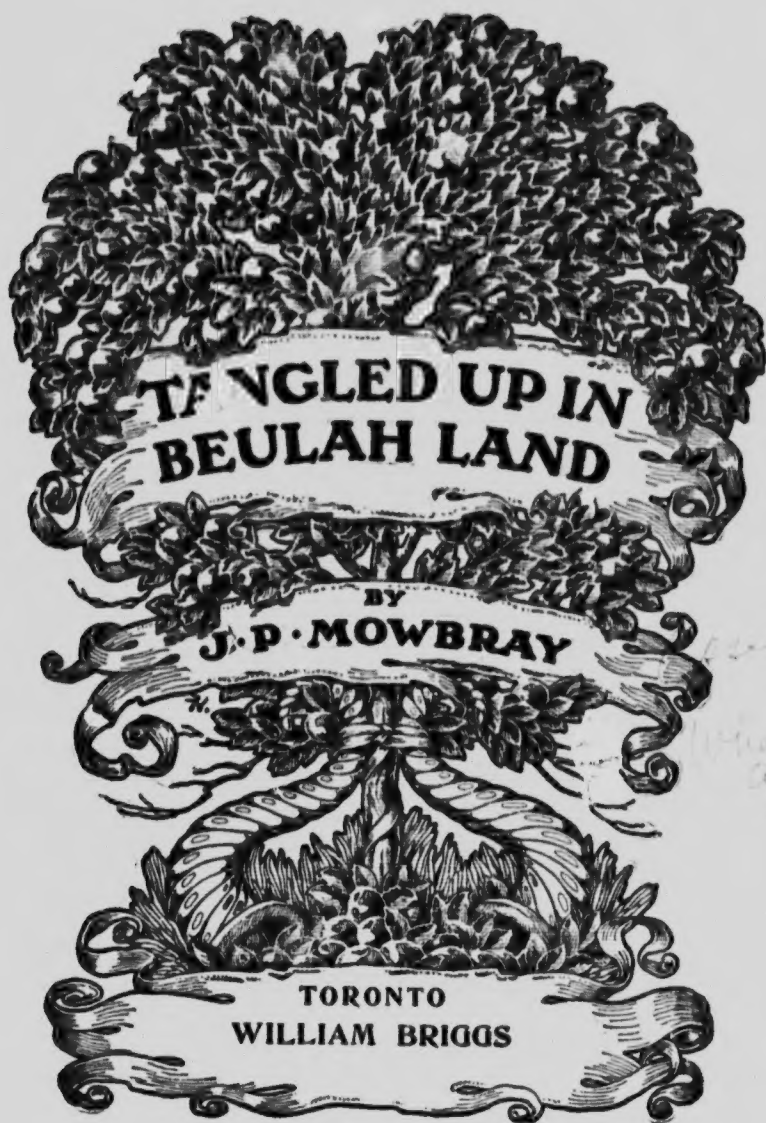


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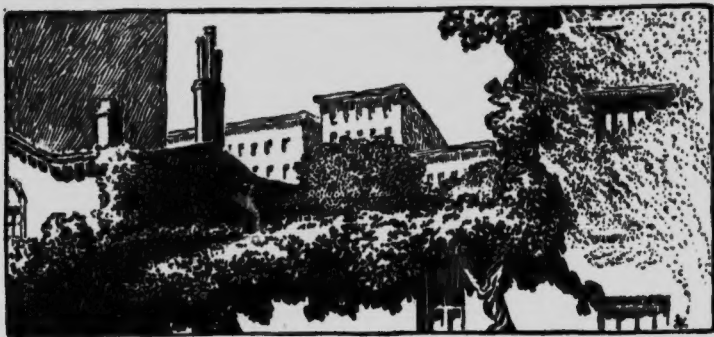
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TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

CHAPTER I

THE DISTURBING DUCKLING

MY excellent half-sister, Madame Petunia Dewey, looked at me with a sparkling superiority as she said:—

“A conscience in a disreputably comfortable man of fifty-four is nothing more than a moral gout. Its twinges annoy without awakening him. He wraps some more flannels about his judgment, and waits for the east wind to stop blowing.”

Petunia looked light and airy in her morning wrap. I often thought that her conversation was

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a sort of glitter, like her white hands when she made a gesture, as if she had gems that she wished to exhibit. Even her reproaches shone a little when she had that crêpe wrap on. But she was a woman of the world, and had acquired some kind of perfumed wisdom from many parterres, or had it acquired for her, like a queen bee, so I forgave the prompt monitorial attitude, and tried to let her see that I bowed to her superiority.

"Petunia," I said, "I am a little worried."

"I don't believe it," she replied. "You are trying to coax yourself into the belief that you can be worried like other human beings. You cannot even assume the air of it."

"Oh, but I am. I never was good at assuming airs. If I suffer at all, it is undramatically. My feelings are singularly devoid of local colour."

"Has your valet struck?"

"Try and be serious a moment."

"Has your doctor cut down on your cigars?"

"My dear Petunia, I think I have passed the point at which these things annoy me."

She assumed an attitude and expression of profound curiosity. "Will you tell me," she said, "what things *can* annoy you?"

"You are a very brilliant example of one of the things that cannot. Try and put yourself in my place a moment."

"It is the most preposterous of impossibilities. Ask me to have myself embalmed before death; to take the veil, or hasheesh — or give absent treatment — anything, Rufus, except to put my-

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self in your place. Why should one indulge in such fantastic feats of the imagination?"

"Because," I said mildly, "it would be more rational than to indulge in unbridled persiflage when a human being and a brother comes to you with a misgiving and asks you for advice."

"Brother, I allow," she replied, "I cannot help myself. But human being, Rufus—isn't that rather a large assumption? Human beings are supposed to have some relation to the rest of the world. You are only related to your club and your son."

"Can it be possible that you regard the latter attachment as a misfortune?"

"Certainly, to the son. He was probably intended, in the nature of things, to be part of the social system. You have succeeded in making him an annex of your own comfort."

"You are disposed to be exceedingly ungracious this morning," I said. "If your acerbity is the result of the social fruit, I ought to congratulate myself that Charlie has been kept out of the orchard."

"I think," she remarked, "that if he had been allowed to eat a few of the green apples it would have benefited him. Life has its necessary colics—at least for young men, and they are probably disciplinary. Does it ever occur to you that you have been trying to teach your one duckling that it is immoral to swim?"

"It is rather unjust to assume that I have detached myself from all human interests because

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your Thursday nights bore me a little. I try to do my duty to society in a comfortable way. I lent my name to a reform club, though I'm not aware that anything has been reformed. I give a hundred dollars a year to your University Settlement affair somewhere, and I suppose the money is properly wasted in committees. I have recently served one term on the grand jury and helped to indict a number of my fellow-citizens. It interfered very much with my afternoon nap, but it left a comfortable feeling that nothing would ever come of the indictments. Do you know what my pew costs me? I rented it to please you."

"I don't see why you should growl about that. It was understood that if you paid in advance, you would not be expected to occupy it."

"I make it a matter of conscience," I said, "to go to the opera with Charlie occasionally, and I think I can say truthfully that I try to look interested, and never by any means betray that I've heard the Jewel Song regularly for the last thirty years, and read the same article about it every morning during that time."

"Delightful!" exclaimed Petunia. "After all, perhaps you are exhausted by your public duties. That had not occurred to me."

"On the contrary, it is my private duty that I wish to speak to you about. You feel, at least, a woman's interest in the future of that boy. Consider a moment — his mother left him in trust to me sacredly. I have given up most of the things

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in life that a man at my age enjoys in order to guard and shape his future. We have been companions, confidants, ever since he and I came out of that experiment in the Hotchkiss woods ten years ago. I have made it the one purpose of my life to correct and redeem in his the errors and shortcomings of mine. I think that you will acknowledge that Charlie has been kept clean and sweet as a girl, shielded from all the temptations and unsmirched by any of the profligacies that make up the curriculum of the well-to-do young man of our day."

My excellent sister took a long breath at the end of my prelude, but she did it very much as if she had said, "You are not candid enough to gasp at your own folly, so I will do it for you."

Then she remarked quite purringly:—

"Very well, conceding the superhuman beauty of your paternalism, what is it is worrying you? Has the moral superiority of your duckling begun to frighten you?"

"Charlie," I observed, "is of a fine, susceptible nature, liable to make irremediable mistakes on the side of his affections, and though I have endeavoured to strengthen his judgment and develop his moral sense of values —"

"The boy is in love," said Petunia; "is that it?"

"I don't think that he could reach that unfortunate condition without confiding it to me. No, I will not say that he is in love, but it might result in that."

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"What might?"

"His boyish fancy for some passing and possibly unworthy person."

"Who is it?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"Certainly — I might have known that."

"You understand that our relations are such that I trust entirely to his honour, his training, and his habit of confiding in me. But, with the very best of educational advantages, a boy of nineteen is apt to be blinded by his senses."

"It isn't the worst kind of blindness," remarked Petunia. "He never can be morally stone blind till he reaches fifty-four."

"Oh, come now, you do not think that I am blind!"

"Totally and irremediably, so far as that boy is concerned. You are afflicted by what ought to be called doting cataracts. What is it you have discovered?"

"Nothing of any importance, I assure you. Perhaps I am inclined to magnify trifles, but the other night, when he had gone out, I came upon a little half-open note that he had left on the table carelessly."

"Ah," said Petunia, with suddenly awakened interest, "you read it."

"Pardon me; I did not. I would not take advantage of his carelessness. But I saw one line before I could help it."

"What incredible forbearance — and that line was —"

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"‘Darling.’"

Petunia seemed to break out into an extra bloom of laughter. Perhaps the word awoke tender and joyful memories in her.

"You do not detect anything sad in it?" I inquired.

"Sad!" she exclaimed. "Why, it is the first peep of exultant nature."

"But there was something else visible at the top of the paper, and I could not avoid seeing it."

"Yes," said my sister, holding her jewelled fingers over her mouth, "it was, 'My only, onliest,' or some other throbbing incoherence."

"No. It was — 'Wallack's Theatre.'"

"Yes," said Petunia, in quite a matter-of-fact way, "how fortunate! It might have been vaudeville."

"The association does not appear to startle you."

"No. It lacks the element of surprise."

"Then you knew something of it?"

"How could I help it? Everybody is not as blind as you are."

"And you never told me," I said pathetically, as I buttoned my coat.

"My dear Rufus, a man who will not read his son's letters will not take his sister's advice. Besides, it is not proper form to nip love's young dream in the bud nowadays. The boy will have his own way, and why waste anxiety about it?"

"Pardon me," I said, "I don't intend that he

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shall, and, for that matter," I added, as I got up, "neither shall you."

"Really now, you speak as if I furnished him with money and shut my eyes on his conduct and believed in his archangel nature. You are doing me a great injustice, Rufus, and it wounds me."

And then my sister drew her handkerchief across one eye with a dainty flourish.

"Are you aware," I said, as I stood in the middle of the room in a suspensive attitude, between an indignant retreat and a final appeal — "are you aware of what boyish folly of this kind may result in?"

"I can estimate the chances," she said. "Ordinarily a flirtation and some needed experience. But with a specially susceptible duckling, liable to have fifteen or twenty thousand a year, it's like the scarlet fever, and apt to leave chronic complications. Have you inquired — they may be married already, you know, and up to their ankles in spilt milk."

Something in my appearance must have touched her at last, for she got up and came to me, leaving her badinage behind her.

"I see you are shocked," she said.

"Terribly. You do not understand how fatally my life is wound up in that boy's."

"I am glad," she said, "if I have shocked you. I hardly believed it possible, and shock is such a necessary method of nature and art, from earthquakes to idols. You take it too seriously. Men are different from women; somebody has said that

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if they were never knocked down they would never get up—it must have been an Irishman. At the worst, the affair would only be temporary. Charlie would probably get divorced in six months.”

“Petunia,” I replied, with as much dignity as I could command, “I feel that in this matter we are talking at each other from different worlds. You do not know how deep it reaches down into my hopes and happiness.”

“No,” she said, “I haven’t thought it necessary to dive so deep, when a small amount of practical sense on your part would stop the nonsense by stopping the supplies.”

She must have seen me shrink a little at the proposition, for she added:—

“But of course you will never do that on account of the boy’s confidence in you.”

“I am not thinking of punitive measures—only of the temperament, the inexperience, and the sad disappointment.”

“Isn’t that about what the hen said to the duckling. Consider the dry barnyard, the comfortable roost, and beware of the duck pond, with its snapping turtles and bullfrogs. Do you know what the duckling said? You have probably forgotten. It was this, ‘I prefer them—it is life.’”

My interview with Petunia was discouraging. She evidently knew more about the conduct of Charlie than she had cared to tell me. Then, too, I had an ill-defined consciousness of my own comfortable remissness, upon which she had so adroitly put her flashing finger. I found myself

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hurrying away in my walk, very much as if there was not much time.

I 'd gone to a woman of the world in what I conceived to be a purely worldly matter. I would now try a man of the world. Men grasped these matters more firmly. There was my old friend, Major Downs, at the Club; he had just the kind of sagacity to handle such a case. Somebody had said he was a Major Pendennis. With a Fotheringay on my hands, what could be more appropriate than a Major Pendennis.

He sat, as usual, at the Club window, watching the afternoon procession on the Avenue. If it were not for his white side-whiskers and equally white mustache and very pink cheeks, I should have likened him to a gargoyle over a temple door, for he was always there, watching the coming and going, with the same unalterable stare. The animated drift of equipages had for him some kind of personal responsibility, as if he had become its automatic indicator, and must note correctly every day in the year if A were driving his bays and B had his tandem out and C was in proper fettle.

"Pull a chair up," he said. "The turnout is very fine to-day. D has just gone up with his drag. I really didn't know he was back."

"D," I said to myself; "it will take him an hour to get through the rest of the alphabet."

"I'm going to smoke a cigar in the reading-room, Major. I wish you would join me at dinner when the show is over."

"Yes, yes," he replied impatiently, as if I were

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disturbing his view, as he bowed to somebody, "yes, yes; F. is in F's landau. They must have made up. New coachman, too. I suppose that old match will be consummated now."

"I will be in the reading-room," I said, and walked away.

When he joined me later at dinner, he was so full of the afternoon drift that it was some time before I could get him around to my affairs, and I had to approach the matter with a guarded indifference.

"Don't you find the season intolerably dull?" I asked.

"Oh, just the usual dulness. I haven't noticed anything extra in it. Nothing happens this time of year."

"Nothing going on even at the theatres?"

He looked up from his plate as if the drop from society to the theatre was not altogether excusable. "I don't think any of our set are going to the theatres now," he said. "It's a little late in the season."

"By our set you mean the old fellows."

"Oh, the young fellows have no regard for the calendar. Some of them would go to the theatre on Good Friday if the ballet was a new one."

"Major," I said, "you can give me a little advice. Did you not have some trouble as guardian with your nephews?"

"Oh, just the ordinary trouble, the regular thing."

"One of the boys made a mesalliance —"

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"Oh, that affair was just the ordinary thing. They were divorced, you know, and the matter fixed up."

"But you tried to prevent it?"

"Not I. I never try to prevent that sort of thing. Go it, I said to the young scamp. If you didn't do this, you would do something worse. Go it while you're young."

"Oh," I remarked, somewhat taken aback, "I got the impression somewhere that you succeeded in preventing the affair, and I was going to ask you how you set about it."

"Prevent it?" said the Major, with admirable surprise, as he held the bottle of Burgundy over his wine-glass. "You can't prevent it — exploded idea, sir. Much the best plan to let the fellow have his swing and have done with it."

"You speak as if a swing limited itself."

"Quite right — quite right. It's like any other debauch. Is your colt kicking?"

"No, no — not at all — not at all."

"If he is, give him the run of the paddock. Whatever you pour into his head will run out of his heels. When he gets tired he will come into the box stall and behave himself."

"And bring another colt with him, perhaps."

"Oh, temporarily — just the ordinary aff-illy-ation," and the Major smacked his lips at his pun.

"As you are pleased to use the stock-breeder's language, Major," I said, "let me remind you that society would do well to imitate his scrupulous care of his stock."

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"Egad," said the Major, "I suppose it does try to, but the tendency of the times is against it, and the stock insist on taking care of themselves. This is a liberal age, you know. Too d——d liberal, I suppose, for some of us old fellows. We can't keep up the lines of caste now without going abroad to live. Why, sir, when you and I were young men and had our swing, — and we did have it, old chap, — we drew the line at anything like permanent alliances. By Jove, the old governors wouldn't have it. I remember, in the sixties, I was smitten, along with a number of other young fellows, by Bonfanti — you remember Bonfanti?"

"Bonfanti," I repeated; "the name sounds familiar. A French actress?"

"No, just a *première assoluta*. We used to squander a good deal of money on tuberoses and japonicas — you remember tuberoses and japonicas were the rage in the early sixties — but, by Jove, sir, nobody thought of setting her down in his family circle. Why, sir, we had dowagers then who would have blighted her with a look. We took our divertissements like gentlemen then, not like business men. I don't know whether the theatre has come up or society has come down, but I'll be hanged if the old chalk-line between them hasn't disappeared. Madame Grampus said a good thing the other night at the Polchers' — what the deuce was it; wait a moment — oh, yes, says she, 'The theatre is a place now where the curtain alone separates the professional beauties

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who have their chance from the professional beauties who haven't.' Rather good that, eh?"

"Rather a sweeping imputation, Major," I remarked.

"Deuced clever, though," replied the Major, his idea of what is deucedly clever being much more liberal than mine.

"You know," he went on, "one of the Polcher boys was educated for a clergyman, and he came home one day with a soubrette on his arm."

"Married?"

"Well, that was the professional claim. I think it cost old Polcher something like ten thousand to get his cub out of it, and the fun of it was that the girl turned out to have a better theological education than the Polcher. Now, you wouldn't look for that sort of thing on the stage when we were young, would you? Let them alone for a year, I said to old Polcher, and it will fix itself. What can you expect if you begin to hamper these young fellows with theology before they get their eye-teeth cut. They must have their experience first and their morality afterward."

I had never given much attention to large educational matters, but this presentation of the rising generation as inverted pyramids must have lit up my face as if a popular cartoon had passed by. The Major must have seen it, for he went on assuringly:—

"Fact, sure as you live. Why, I remember when our governors used to say, train up a child

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in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not bolt the track. You remember that it was the school motto over the teacher's desk. Bless my soul, those old fellows really believed it. But you don't see it now. Got broader views. Leave them alone, and they'll come home and bring their tails behind them, doesn't look well worked in worsted—so now we work it in taffeta."

These glistening gems of thought, thrown off over his wine by the Major, made me feel very lonely, and I could not help regarding the Major for the moment as a social siphon intent only on aerating the conversation.

I had a personal grievance, a private bereavement, and it was very plain that the Major would regard it as one of those weaknesses out of which a man of the world should grow. I ought to have arrived at "just the ordinary indifference" to any such foolishness as was involved in trying to keep my boy from traversing my old tracks. It was impossible either to make my excellent half-sister or the Major understand how my mature roots had become entangled in this sapling, and how I resented, with all my might, the idea of giving him up to his "swing."

The boy had come home from college six months before, looking a little worn and pale, and the physician had said he must have a year's rest. We had taken the elegant apartments uptown, and had gone into that luxurious bachelor chumship so seldom sustained by father and son, and which I fondly believed was a renewal of the

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pleasant companionship of former days, when we were boys together off there in the Hotchkiss woods.

Now that there was some uncertain danger of being compelled to give the fellow up to his own courses, I became aware of how inextricably woven into me were all the hopes and gentler ambitions and reliant affections that our companionship had nurtured. I believe I could have given the rascal up and said, "God speed, Comrade," if I had been confident that his departure was insured against the pitfalls, the rocks, the sirens, and miserable mistakes through which I had laboriously come. It would be unbearably forlorn for me, no doubt, but I would weather it through somehow. The covert allusions of my sister and the Major hurt me. They both assumed that Charlie had easily and naturally lent himself to some kind of hypocrisy, and was leading one life to my face and another behind my back. I blushed at the recreancy to Charlie of such a thought. I would read the truth in his candid face. At the worst, I said, I have the matter in my own hands, and can at any time shut off the supplies and bring him up with a round turn.

He did not return to the rooms until one o'clock that night. When he opened the door he started a little, I thought, to see me sitting up so late.

"Been to the theatre?" I asked, as unconcernedly as possible.

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"Yes."

"What theatre?"

"Wallack's," and he bustled round getting off his dress coat and slipping on a jacket.

"Anything interesting to be seen there?"

"English burlesque. Some interesting people in it."

"Ah — would it interest me?"

"Hardly; you are not easily interested, Dad."

This, I thought, was the first intimation that there was a divergence in our tastes. He came over to the table and saw the open letter with its telltale heading, where he had dropped it, and, picking it up with a passing expression of annoyance at his own carelessness, put it in his jacket pocket. The act was a fine example of the delicacy of our relationship. He knew I had not read the letter. "What kept you up so late?" he asked.

"Was looking over some old papers."

"Did you dine at the Club?"

"Yes, with Major Downs. It was very dull. In fact, the town has got so dull that I was going to propose that we run away somewheres."

"You don't mean abroad?" with a little, sudden start, I thought.

"Why not? I'm getting almost lonely."

"Why, I was saying only this morning, how pleasant the town is becoming, now that the bores are all leaving it."

"Perhaps you would like me to clear out on that theory, Comrade?"

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He had gone over to the bookcase, and was looking for a novel, with his back toward me. At this remark he turned squarely around and looked at me inquiringly, with a copy of Meredith in his hands.

I could not help remarking to myself how handsome he looked, as his mother's features and her unruffled candour of expression came out in the light of the chandelier as he stood there.

"Go without me?" he said. "You speak as if you thought it would please me."

"Well, I have fallen into such a habit of accommodating you, that I suppose I could do even that if it would make you more comfortable."

"Oh, then cut it," he said. "I'd look like a detached spar floating around in these rooms without you."

"What do you suppose I would look like, floating around Europe without you?"

"Well, you can at least wait till the season is over."

"Do you mean the theatrical season?"

He did not answer me promptly, and I fumbled something on the table, trying to recall the words of Iago about "trifles light as air," and failing. I was never good at quoting anything literally. The theatrical company would be going back to England at the end of the season. I waited. I felt, rather than saw, that there was in Charlie's face an expression of inquiry—a possible pause between suspicion and doubt. Then he

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came up to me and put his hand on my shoulder in his old affectionate way, and I felt, even before he spoke, that candour had taken the bit in its mouth.

"Dad," he said, "I never lied to you in my life, and it is too late to begin now. If there is anything on your mind, give it to me straight and let's have it out."

I was not equal to having it out. Something forewarned me that if I precipitated the issue, he would have the best of it.

"I never doubted you, Comrade," I said, "and it's too far into the night to open a new catechism. I am going to bed. Good night."

"Good night, Dad."

I felt when I was alone that I had temporized with the matter in a most craven manner. Some kind of passive rage took possession of me and kept me awake. It was not indignation at Charlie, but at some impalpable danger that threatened to come between us.

About half-past two, tired of my own foolish perplexities, and seeing the light reflected from the sitting room, I got up softly and, going along the passage, peeped through the portière. He was sitting at the table. Meredith's novel was turned face down, and, lying back in the chair, Charlie was staring at a photograph which he held in his hand, and his face wore an expression that I had never seen there before.



CHAPTER II

AFFECTION AS A GAY DECEIVER

IHAD taken lunch with my sister, Mrs. Petunia Dewey, and, to get rid of listeners, she had our coffee taken into the conservatory, where, she said, I could smoke as violently as I pleased — the smoke was an insecticide, and good for her Madame Lambard tea roses.

“So,” she said, as she spread her laces, “you think your heir has fallen among the Philistines.”

“No, no, Petunia, do not say fallen. He may have encountered some seductive influences, and, owing to his ignorance of the world, may have had his senses entangled. I thought if I could get him away, it would be to his benefit and my peace of mind.”

She smiled rather incredulously, I thought.

“You don’t believe he will go,” I said.

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"I was smiling," she replied, "at your belief in your ability to carry him off. Men are so credulous with respect to their own strength at your age."

"But you understand," I said, "that the boy is closely attached to me—I have always made an intimate companion of him, and I have that influence over him still —"

She waved her hand as if my idea annoyed her, and she wished to brush it away. "I clearly understand that you are so attached to the boy that you will let him do as he pleases in the end."

"I think you underestimate my strength of purpose as well as my influence."

"Oh, I dare say it is a fine, fatherly feeling, but it lacks dramatic interest for a young man. I dare say he has committed himself by this time, without regard to your arrangements or feelings."

"You don't know that he has?" I asked abruptly.

"I am not going to worry you, Rufus, by telling you how much I know. It is enough for me that you have done your best to develop the faculties in that boy that usually end in a reckless plunge."

"Then you can suggest no means by which I can save him from what to both of us would be a very disastrous mistake?"

"Nothing," said Petunia, "unless —" and she paused.

"Unless what?"

"Unless you take a fatal plunge yourself."

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"Marriage? Absurd."

"Do you think so? It might bring somebody into the menage who has a clearer idea of the practicalities than you have. I can't imagine anything that would fetch your boy to terms so quick as the prospect of it. There was the Widow Coldcream. It was generally supposed last year that she had set her cap for you, and, if I'm not mistaken, your young gentleman developed some unmistakable signs of sudden hatred for her. Coldcream is ten years younger than you are. She has a very small income, it is true, but she moves in the best circles, and it is generally understood that she has a decided financial talent. She got it from her father, Drake Coldcream, who was at one time an expert in handling other people's estates."

If I were not constitutionally slow in my apprehensions, I would have thanked my sister then and there for the suggestion. But at the time I was thinking only of one thing, and it was that she knew more about Charlie's life than she cared to tell me, and I went away considerably nettled to think that nobody had the slightest confidence in my ability to save that boy from a piece of youthful folly.

But I had not walked two blocks before the exercise freshened my faculties. Something seemed to occur to me. I stopped suddenly, and, exclaiming, "Well, bless my soul!" turned back and made my way at a rapid pace to my sister's again.

"I beg your pardon, Petunia," I said, as she

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came out in the hall wearing a look of surprise, "you don't happen to have a photograph of Madame Coldcream, do you?"

"Yes," she replied, with a smile, "I think I have. Sit down there a moment. I'll hunt it up for you."

When she put it into my hands I saw a picture of a highly respectable and slightly prim elderly lady in black, whose jaw indicated considerable decision of character, and whose attire showed a rich but obdurate disregard of the prevailing mode. I put the picture in my breast pocket, merely thanking my sister. But when I reached the door she whispered in my ear, so that her servant could not hear, "I would call on her if I were you."

Having reached my rooms, I found a note for me that Charlie had left:—

"Have gone to the ball match—don't wait dinner for me—must be back, however, before seven."

What a naïve confession, I said. The curtain rings up at eight, of course.

Everything Charlie did now was beginning to be flavoured by my own suspicions, and I suppose I was pretty melancholy there alone in the rooms. I sat thinking over the past, and our almost sacred intimacy that threatened to be disturbed, and something the Doctor had once written to me when we were off there in the Hotchkiss woods kept reverberating in my mind. Finally, I got out a tin box and began hunting for the letter to

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see just exactly what it was he had said, that could echo so freshly now.

At last I found it, yellow and faded. As I opened it, some dried lilac petals fell out of it. I laid back in my chair, with the letter in my hand, and mused a moment. The filmy smoke of my cigar seemed to be wreathed by my fancy into half-human convolutions, and a Florentine maid went undulantly by and dissolved into thin air.

These were the doctor's words that I had tried to recall:—

"The man who has a pulpy replica that can climb up on his knees need not waste regrets that he cannot live his life over again. He *is* living it over again. Let him regard himself with fear and trembling. How is he to load the results of his experience into that shallop of himself without sinking it? Presently the young sails will be set and you will see yourself starting out to try it all over again. No compasses nor charts of yours will save him from the sirens. You must sit there on the sands and wait. Some day, perhaps, he will come forlornly back, looking for the old love, and, maybe, find only the runes and the water-marks."

Dear old Doctor, how unerringly sad his clear vision was, beside the worldly observations to which I had lately listened. I had not heard from him for four years. He had retired somewhere, full of honours, and I had no doubt was still full of vitality. I sat down and wrote him a

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long letter, which, I dare say, if I could read it now, would appear to be absurdly effusive and appalling.

It was a stormy evening, — a bitter spring rain with sleet was driving against the window, — and, not caring to venture out, I ordered a dinner for two sent in; and when it was ready to serve, Charlie arrived.

"There's no place like home to-night, Dad," he remarked.

"Then I'll stay in and keep you company," I replied. "I've ordered a good dinner. How is your appetite?"

"Prime," he said. "Let me get my jacket on, and I will carve that capon for you." He was in excellent spirits, and I felt that he was bestowing upon me some of the exhilaration that another person had supplied. But I was not to be outdone by this sort of elation.

"Capital!" I cried. "I'll give you the whole evening, Comrade. I suppose you do get lonely here at times, and, come to think of it, it's a lonely business. I shouldn't be surprised if we both went off in different directions looking for the necessary female society."

"Both of us? Oh, don't say that."

"Well," I remarked, "it could be made a shade more homelike than two men can make it. But we'll remedy all that in good time, eh?"

"Remedy what?"

"The heavy air of bachelordom. But it will correct itself. Have a little patience, my boy.

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There, there, that will do — help yourself. Will you try some of the wine to-night?"

"No, thank you. Have you been trying it?"

"Certainly not. It is possible for some men to be in good spirits without the aid of wine, though I doubt, my boy, if they could get along permanently without Luther's two other adjuncts," and I poured out the amber liquid with a generous dash of exultation, and pretended not to see the puzzled look that he gave me.

"I don't think you are quite fair with me," he said. "You alluded last night to something and then strode off to bed without an explanation. It isn't like you."

"No, I was not very candid, but I have made up my mind to be perfectly frank with you."

"Frank about what? You are not going to lecture me at dinner, are you?"

"Certainly not."

"When I explain matters to you and put the thing in the right light —"

"Hold on," I said, "you've got it wrong. I'm going to explain matters to you, and when you see them in the right light, you will agree with me. You eat your dinner, and let me talk. You have noticed, of course, that I have not given you as much of my society lately as you are entitled to, and you must have had a suspicion of what was going on. I ought to have taken you into my confidence at the start, I suppose. But in these matters everybody is naturally more or

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less selfish. But as the matter involves something of a change in our establishment — ”

Charlie laid down his knife and fork, and, leaning back, took a long breath.

“By George, Governor, you’re not thinking of—”

“Why, yes, I am, Comrade. Now don’t give me that nonsense about my being too old. I never felt in better feather in my life, and a man at fifty-four doesn’t enjoy any immunity in these matters. Hang me, if you don’t look as if my confidence were misplaced.”

“It’s a little sudden, isn’t it?”

“Well, I never did linger much over such affairs, and I don’t suppose you will when you come to face them.”

“Do I know the lady?”

“You may have seen her, but you cannot know her as I do, until you have acquainted yourself with her many virtues. Solid sort — fine, mature judgment, great refinement of taste, and a capital manager.”

“Has she got a son abroad?”

“Ah, you dog, you have got upon my trail.”

“Coldcream. Moses!”

“Why Moses?” I asked with slight dignity.

“I don’t know,” he answered helplessly. “Ancient history, I suppose.”

“Don’t be disrespectful, my boy. This is a very serious matter to me.”

“I think, sir, it will be equally serious to me.”

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"Ah, then we shall understand each other perfectly."

"When did you make up your mind to this?"

"When did I? Why, there you have me. One's mind is made up by such imperceptible degrees in these matters, and they are usually of such a nature that he does not remark the progress."

"Then it is made up?"

"Why, as to that, I suppose I can say it is. The final word has not been spoken — I thought I would like to have a little word with you before speaking it. Don't you think Madame Coldcream is an unusually fine-looking woman?"

"Oh, pardon me, Dad; it isn't fair to push me to the point of declaring that I differ from you."

"You must lay your prejudices aside, my boy. Madame Coldcream has connections in Warwickshire. Her family is one of the oldest in the kingdom. Her son is in the English consular service. A very fine fellow, I understand, but hampered a little for want of funds — was educated at Leipsic."

At this he got up and took a purposeless turn or two. Presently he came up and laid his hand on my shoulder in the old familiar way.

"Say, Dad, this is so unexpected, don't you know, it takes the wind out of me. I suppose there's no use of my expressing an opinion about it, however respectfully."

It was as much as I could do to keep from

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catching him by both hands and letting the bottom out of my device by one weak rebound—he looked so forlorn. However, I kept up my paternal recklessness as well as I could.

“Comrade,” I said, “I knew that it would strike you like cold water at the first dash, but when you come to see her through my eyes, as you are bound to do, you will agree with me. You will, I am sure of it. There’s a picture of her. Study the ample brow, and breadth of the lower face.”

And I pulled out the photograph. He took it mechanically, and I, pouring out some more wine, galloped on over my home stretch.

“Remark the equipoise of faculties—the strength of jaw, and the aristocratic pose of the head. Just the kind of woman to keep a foolish old man like your Dad well in hand, don’t you think?”

I knew very well that he was not looking at the photograph at all, but was looking over it at his Dad with a melancholy tenderness, and so I did not turn around.

“There’s a quiet authority about that kind of woman that is worth its weight in gold in society.”

Then I waited a moment, but he said nothing. So I pushed back my chair, and, getting up, took the photograph from his hands and walked over to the grate, where I stood regarding it tenderly with my back to him. But there was a mirror over the mantle, and I could keep one eye on

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him as he stood there, leaning against the bookshelves, with his eyes on the carpet.

It was two days after this when I got an answer from the Doctor to my letter. It was characteristically brief and pertinent, and read as follows :

TUSKALOO, PA.

"MY DEAR OLD FRIEND: I am out of practice, and the invalid world will have to hobble over its chasms without me. As to your predicament, I foresaw something of it long ago, and warned you of it when you kept coddling that boy's sensibilities at the expense of his will. I should not be surprised if it were now too late, and you were to find out that it is easier to lift yourself by your own waistband than to lift somebody else, when you have taken such precious good care to deprive him of a waistband. I suppose that some of your chickens have respect enough for the proverb to come home to roost, and I cannot for the life of me see what I can do to block the wheels of Nature's Juggernaut, unless you come down here with the young rascal, where you and I can, perhaps, throw ourselves jointly under the car. I have been making my final cocoon here, and have wound myself about pretty comfortably with my own silk for the final transformation; but if you collar the ingrate and drag him to my doorstep, why, confound you, there's a warm place for both of you in my idiotic old heart, and mayhap redemption in my menage."

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These racing metaphors did not then amuse me. I thought only of the generous nature that defied them.

Anything like an intrigue has always been very repugnant to me, and I never was on masquerade in my life. But, all at once, I found myself intriguing against my own boy, and acting, at my sister's suggestion, a little comedy-drama for his reclamation. Still, there was no help for it. Most comedy-dramas have for their purpose the outwitting of the intrigante, and mine was no exception. Who she was, or what she was, or what she looked like, I had not the faintest notion other than my bedizened fears had portrayed her. It was a fight carried on in the dark so far as the antagonists were concerned, because I shrank a little from the light. It had never occurred to Charlie, poor fellow, while he was running his head into some kind of a silken noose, that his old Dad could encounter the same fate. It began to dawn upon his mind that his old Dad was, after all, an important, if not an inestimable, factor in his future arrangements, and not to be carried off, if he could help it, by some alien. I flattered myself that I had awakened in him something of my sense of loss in having any marrying going on in our small family.

To me, at least, the situation must have had a humorous, almost a farcical, aspect, but I was playing a high, conservative game, and did not at the time consider the absurdity of father and son doing their best to keep each other from reaping

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the benefit of their folly. The only person alive who had the full advantage of whatever humour there was in it was my half-sister, Petunia, to whom my alarmed scion rushed, just as I had done, when he awoke to the fact that a mature siren was after his Dad, scrip and scrippage.

Petunia, that most admirable social manager, preserved a family discretion, and exercised a most tactful wisdom.

"Your idol has been to see me," she said, a day or two later, "and he wore an encouraging suggestion of being shattered."

"Poor Charlie!" I murmured.

"I suppose you are ready to patch him up in any way he desires?"

"Dear boy, it's his first pang."

"First rubbish. Do compose yourself, and don't begin your quivering."

"I suppose he felt the blow keenly. What did he say?"

"He announced to me, with an almost super-human air of distress, that you thought of taking a wife. I congratulated him.

"'But, my dear aunt,' he said, 'you don't know who it is. It's Coldcream.'

"'So I have heard,' I replied. 'A most excellent choice—a woman of shrewd business capacity. She only needs an income to be able to exercise a real talent for managing. I cannot imagine a better supervising partner for my brother.'

"'Then you seriously approve of it?' he asked me with blank surprise.

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“‘Undoubtedly.’

“‘But you do not consider me.’

“‘Consider you?’ I said. ‘You could not let your selfishness interfere with your father’s happiness. You are young, and have your own path to make. It does not become you, Charles,’ I observed, ‘to be thinking only of yourself.’

“‘I am not, I assure you,’ said the young hypocrite. ‘I am thinking of him. A man at his age, with responsibilities, is as liable to make mistakes, I suppose, as a young man. You must remember, Aunt, that we are very much attached to each other.’”

“He said that, did he?”

“Yes, but I did not tell him that it was just what you had said.”

“No. That was not necessary.”

“I reminded him that true affection is largely made up of self-sacrifice; that he would be getting married himself presently, and would probably take a woman who supported herself by her own talents, and who would not need your assistance.”

“Do you think it was necessary to go as far as that?”

“Yes, I certainly do, and when I went that far he acted exactly as you did. He buttoned up his coat, took the middle of the floor, tried to look as if he wanted to hate me, and then collapsed. I didn’t tell him that you were a pair, but you are.”

“He certainly takes after me in some respects.”

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"Not in looks, Rufus."

"You think not?"

"Oh, he is like his mother—the handsome young cub. I wanted to get up and give him a good shaking as he stood there, but I had my laces on, and couldn't afford to rumple my authority."

"Did you ascertain definitely just how far his passing infatuation has gone?" I asked this rather timidly, fearing that she might tell me.

"Head over heels, Rufus. It's what your friend the Major calls just the ordinary madness of youth—but fatal."

"Bless my soul, Petunia, you speak as if it were a hopeless case."

"Precisely. That's exactly the way I spoke to him about you, and he went off in the same way and asked me if it were a hopeless case. I told him it was, unless he got you away immediately. Rufus, you will have to get each other away as quickly as possible, if only for my sake."

And Petunia held her jewelled hand over her mouth, as if to suppress an unseemly impulse of humour.

"But the rascal will not go until the season is over," I said, "and everything else may be over by that time."

"Oh, to save you, I think he will consent to wrench himself a little. By the way, he expressed the same doubt about your consenting to go. You see you will both have to consent for each other's sakes. It's getting intricate, isn't it? If

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you should both go, it will be interesting to see which protects the other the best."

"You gave him some advice, did you not?"

"How could I help it. The handsome young profligate appealed to my woman's sensibilities in spite of myself."

"Excuse me, Petunia, 'profligate' is rather an unnecessarily harsh word to apply to that boy."

"He looked so crestfallen at the prospect of the Coldcream gobbling all the resources — you don't object to 'gobbling,' do you? it is such a comprehensive vulgarism — that I had to treat him confidentially, just as I do you."

"Heavens, Petunia, you did not betray to him that my idea of marrying was a mere ruse?"

"Not exactly. I said to him, 'Young man, these are difficult cases to handle. Men of your father's age are unreasonably susceptible. The only thing to do is to get him away from the illusions that affect the mature eye.'"

"What did the boy say?"

"He walked about a bit, tugged at his mustache, and said, 'Confound it, he wanted to go to Europe the other day, and I opposed it. Now he's got over it.'"

"'Yes,' I remarked, 'the Coldcream probably talked him out of it, because she isn't ready to go herself. You know she has had a project for years of going to the Holy Land to live permanently, on account of the sweet oil there. Her brother is consul at Beirut.' 'How terrible!' remarked your innocent."

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"Petunia," I said, "I have received an invitation from my old friend and adviser, the Doctor, to bring the boy down there. If I could get him away and under new influences, I feel that it would be advantageous."

"It will never work. You must let him get you away," replied Petunia. "You do not seem to see that it is most important that he should save you. These young fellows shy at the first intimation of being saved themselves."

That evening I came home rather late and suddenly. Charlie was there waiting for me. He had not been out. I fondly fancied that there was a slight shade of anxiety in his face, that Meredith could not quite dispel.

"What's the matter, Dad?" he asked. "You appear to be worried."

"Yes," I said. "Deuce take it, I received a letter from the Doctor, asking me to come down to his place in Pennsylvania, and spend a month — you remember the Doctor?"

"Of course I do — a grand old man. Why don't you go?"

"I should like to, but, to tell the truth, it will interfere with some other private arrangements of mine just now. It's too bad, too, for nothing would please me better, and he expects me. Do you think this white tie becomes me as well as those black ones?"

"I shouldn't think you would let such an opportunity slip."

"Well, Comrade, I suppose I'm getting too

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old or too indolent to travel alone. That barber has cut my hair in a new style—he says it makes me look five years younger.” Then I strode over to the mirror to admire myself.

Charlie laughed ironically. “I hope,” he said, “that I shall be as chipper at your age as you are, and as ready to go off at a tangent.”

“Why can’t *you* run down there and explain matters?” I said. “I might join you for a few days, later, though I suppose if the Doctor got me there he would not let me get away.”

“Let me see the letter, Dad.”

This unexpected shot converted me into a gay deceiver literally. I began feeling in my pocket for it, saying, “What the deuce did I do with that letter?” But, of course, having carefully burnt it up, I did not find it.

“It is one of his brief and imperative notes,” I said. “I’ll have to write him and beg off.”

“Why, it was only a day or two ago that you wanted to run away somewhere, and now you funk at the first opportunity.”

“Yes,” I said, “but it will interfere with something else now. You don’t want me to go, do you?”

“Yes—if it will interfere with something else.”

This was candour with a vengeance, but I was too old to be caught off my guard by such a left-hander. We sat down and pretended to waive the whole matter. “By the way,” I said, “have we got a Baedeker among our books?”

“Yes,” he said, “there is an old one.”

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"Give it to me, please."

He handed me the guide-book, and I settled myself to study it with an air of great interest. He could not stand more than five minutes of this; then he said:—

"Well, Dad, you're not good company to-night. I'm going to leave you."

"All right, my boy," I replied, keeping my eye on the page. "You run along. I'll leave the gas burning for you."

He put on his coat. I was a little afraid he would take me at my word, but he stood a moment, and then said:—

"It seems to me you are not quite as frank with me as you ought to be."

I looked at him over the page as I replied: "I do not see what could put that in your head. I wish to satisfy myself about some details in this book that I didn't wish to bore you with—"

"You are not disposed to make a visit to the Doctor, and at the same time you are studying the European routes. Is that quite candid?"

"My dear fellow, I am not going down to the Doctor's alone. There is no pleasure in that."

"But you think of going abroad in company on account of the pleasure. It seems to me that there might be a duty in not going."

I laid the book down as I said, "I hadn't thought of the matter in the light of a duty—duty to whom?"

"Well, to me, Dad. I think you owe it to me to take a reasonable care of your health and go slow."

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"Go slow? What do you mean? There is no danger of my changing my habits. They are pretty well fixed."

"How about your tastes?"

"They were always quite liberal. There never was a time when I could not admire the sterling qualities of a thoroughbred woman. That is one of the tastes that improve with age."

"Do you know what I think?" he said. "You need a change."

"Yes," I replied, "I have felt it for some time. I was going to speak to you about it."

"We shall not agree about the nature of the change. You need toning up by a vigorous masculine nature of your own kind — a man of large views, who understands you. You will pardon me, Dad, but you — well, the fact is, you understand me — this kind of life is apt to make you — well, just a little eccentric. You really ought to consult your old friend, the Doctor. If I have not the right to feel concerned about you, nobody has. Didn't he save your life once?"

"Yes, he did. But you do not think there is any need of his services to save it now, I hope. I never was in better condition in my life."

"Physically, yes. But the mind will get stagnant or capricious in one rut. You have changed, Dad, of late; there's no use in my denying it."

"No; look here, Comrade, you don't mean to insinuate that I am failing, do you?"

"I hope not," said my young Guardian, rather pathetically. "Why don't you ask your sister or

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the Doctor? I've heard you say more than once that a man cannot do at fifty-five what he did at twenty-five."

"Fifty-four, Comrade," I remarked. "Try and be accurate."

"I don't think it's fair to push me into the attitude of a mentor. I have always looked to you for discretion and sobriety."

"Egad, that's fine," I said. "Shows how you differ from the young men of the time, and have absorbed my teachings. Go on; do you know, I rather like it."

"Oh, I can't advise you, Dad. But I am sure your old friend could. He would tell you that you need a change — perhaps he can furnish it. Your mind is too active to accept a petty round like this permanently. It disturbs the healthy activities. I am using your own words, sir. Why, you have bought six neckties in two days. How is that for fifty-four — to be accurate?"

"In a sense, perhaps, you are right," I said. "We have been thinking too much of ourselves. That's the very thing I want to correct."

"It sounds rather harsh," he replied, "to be told that I must think of somebody besides you. I have not been accustomed to it."

I had to hold myself down by the arms of the chair. To give way now to a natural impulse would ruin all. Besides, these young rascals have a way of working your sensibilities to their own ends that cannot be relied upon. He was watching me to see if a weak spot appeared. Presently he said:—

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"You want new faces and new environment with some of the old and best influences. Why not cut everything and take a new dash? I'm not thinking of myself, though I should really like to see the Doctor."

"But I couldn't think of dragging you away when the city is at its best."

"Yes, I know, but consider the joy it would give me to drag you away."

I threw the Baedeker on the table. "Confound you," I said, "I suppose you will have your own way. You always do."

"When will you go?"

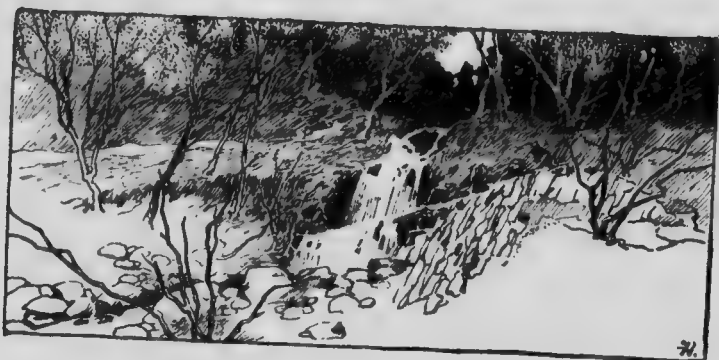
"There's no hurry, is there?"

"Oh, yes, there is. If we mean it, let's have at it before somebody changes your mind."

As I fell into a condition of helpless acquiescence, I could see that there was a sly look of triumph in his face as he took off his coat again and bustled around the room. Perhaps there was a similar look in my face, as I thought I had got him back into leading-strings, like the little fellow I had so often cajoled before, and I said musingly to myself, with Mother Goose's irony, as I watched him:—

Goosey, goosey gander,
O whither would you wander?

But I dare say he was equally self-congratulatory, and was saying to himself, "I'll spike Cold-cream's gun, confound her!"



CHAPTER III

WHERE IS TUSKALOO?

IT was a nasty May day when we locked our rooms and saw our traps loaded on an express wagon. A sharp, wet wind was blowing from the northeast, bringing flurries of aggravating crystals and boring into one's marrow acutely. It required considerable moral determination on my part to abandon my comfortable quarters and my easy habits and go blindly forth on such an uncertain chase as this in the teeth of an acrid spring.

Neither of us had a very definite idea of where we were going or what it was we were to accomplish by going. But I am quite sure that each of us held stoutly to the vague notion that it was a stern duty to get the other away.

I must say that Charlie kept up the appearance of bravery at the start much better than I did.

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He fussed about with what looked like resolute energy, as if he were a little afraid I would change my mind if he did not get me started immediately. But what does a fellow of his age know or care about weather or definite destination? I was glad to get into our comfortable section on the train, for the city we were leaving was about as woebegone under the spring infliction as I had ever seen it — business trying to execute itself under futile umbrellas, plunging about in sticky and slimy streets; leaden skies hanging low and emitting wintry blasts fitfully.

I could see the look of relief on the young rascal's face as we took possession of our compartment. He was saying to himself, "I've got him landed anyway, and now if his old friend the Doctor does not keep him out of mischief, when he understands the case, then I deserve to have Madame Coldcream for a keeper."

I forgave him easily because I could not bring myself to believe that he was reading me as well. He must have been joyously ignorant of the fact that I was saying to myself, "I've got the scapegrace started, and if he gets away from my friend the Doctor, when the Doctor understands the case, then I deserve to have a dancing soubrette, or whatever the thing may be, for a daughter."

Just exactly into what kind of a country we were plunging by the aid of our self-sacrifice neither of us knew. Tuskaloo might as well have been in Thibet or hid away in the Carnac

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Alps, as far as our knowledge extended. The Doctor had on one occasion referred to the domain that had swallowed him up as "Beulah Land." Whether this was his affectionate way of labelling things that took his eye or was so set down in the surveys, I had not the faintest idea. If Charlie had asked me as we sat there, what kind of a place Pennsylvania is, I presume I should have answered in a large and comprehensive way, that Pennsylvania is the Keystone state, crossed diagonally by the Appalachian chain, with three great terraces respectively inhabited by Moravians, Scotchmen, Quakers, and rattlesnakes, and beautifully traversed by thin and noble rivers. Perhaps I might have expressed the conviction that Pennsylvania is a barbaric domain that is always committing a sort of commercial hara-kari and disembowelling itself of coal and iron and other intestinal products for the benefit of mankind and the much smudging of itself.

But Charlie had not the slightest curiosity about the matter. He settled himself comfortably over a novel, and had evidently made up his mind not to look out of the car window or in any manner interest himself in our destination. He would be satisfied to get there and see me safely entangled in an old friend's hospitality. Then he would find some excuse to hurry back to New York and have the full swing of our rooms.

Before we reached Harrisburg, he had the

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car window open and had relinquished his novel, for the spring, full-blossomed, was coming up that way. He noticed that the sunshine was quite yellow, the air was heavy with the scent of lilacs, and the glades were already purple with the hepatica.

The traveller leaves behind him at Harrisburg most of those familiar reminders of a common country and thereafter slips easily into what is distinctively Pennsylvania. But if he is unburdened, as we were, by personal or commercial predilections, he accepts the new conditions as he penetrates them, with a comfortable wonder and a calm zest, and thinks of them as belonging not so much to Pennsylvania as to a pleasing picture that defies locality. As he reaches the Juniata and turns north to Mifflintown, a new and serene pastoral world welcomes him with pleasant outstretch. It remains to all such persons as come that way for the first time, to discover the Juniata for themselves, and to wonder, as so many Englishmen have done, why they have not heard more about it. But it is when the vagrant traveller takes the great bend southward again at Mifflintown, in obedience to the graceful sweep of this river, and spins along between the Black Log and the Jacks ranges, half the length of Mifflin County, in a vale beside which Tempe was rude and gaunt, that he feels himself rather voluptuously entering Beulah Land. He may at some time have called Maine and New Hampshire and the Berkshire hills the Switzerland of America in succession.

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We all do. But when he reaches this spot, he is very apt to give over all that nonsense and call this the America of America, as if it were the heart of it, and wearing upon its plateaus and meadowy pleasancess, and waving in its gonfalon surprises, high up the timber line, a constant suggestion of calm, beauty, and remoteness. The railway has pierced its secret with iron, but it could not destroy it. The charm that hangs heavy on its gladdening pictures is like a Sabbath-yesterday; and whether the scenes are English or Scotch, whether they are like Lombardy or Brittany, and they are like all of these in succession, they preserve for us the picturesqueness of Nature and the thrift of a happy and contented people in such combination as one will find nowhere else. And always it is the beautiful river that does the chief beguiling. It is so flush and exultant and joyously companionable, growing under your eye more voluble and capricious as it narrows towards its source in the mountains; springing upon one unexpected *tours de force* of shadowy pools and silver reaches; little enchanted islands, fantastically embowered, scurrying past; and fringed margins of poplar and larch leaping into masterpieces as the eye grasps after them. Other rivers lend their presence to man soberly on his journeyings. This little river accompanies him like a true artist and forever thrums, now softly and now wildly, on the lyre of God.

Somewhere, far down this legendary vale, lying in the silences, is Tuskaloo. One does not

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stumble over it as if it were an advertisement. One has to hunt for it as if it were a sentiment. It is encompassed by what remains of the grandiose American forest — that stupendous coverlet that once spread over this state and canopied Kentucky and Tennessee on the other side of the great range; out of whose trackless glooms the Indian peered in war paint, and under whose endless apse civilization had to hew its way when it went up to possess the land.

Some insistent commonplaces of travel may have fretted us as we neared our destination, but I have forgotten them. There was of course the regular railway station. I believe there were heads of through passengers thrust out of the train to see if possible why anybody should get off there, and then the train left us to the mercy of a lumbering stage-coach that swallowed up our traps and invited us to be swallowed up ourselves as it cried aloud, "All aboard for Tuskaloo."

Charlie bravely kept up an appearance of interest and inspected the homespun and tow-frocked inhabitants, and remarked to me that it was Arden peopled only with Audreys, to which I replied: "Yes, my Boy, I know, I know. But we are doing the 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' Let us keep our repertory straight."

To be rolled away over cushiony roads, already padded with grass and moss, our vehicle giving back no other sound than the stretching and flapping of its leathers, and to be brushed by blossomy boughs and to sniff the arbutus that

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our wheels crushed ; always confronting that little river at unexpected moments, to hear it cry out liquidly, "Here I am again," — all this was to slip submissively enough out of accustomed life into Tuskaloo, which was something slumberously incredible to men so lately escaping from the thousand fangs of sound.

It gave me a Rip Van Winkle-ish feeling to be set down in front of an old tavern with a swinging sign on the green in front, and, as I live, indubitable evidences that human beings played bowls there — probably in the twilight.

It was difficult to restrain one's archaic inclinations when thus plumped, as one might say, into the eighteenth century. I came perilously near to saluting the tavern-keeper as mine host and swearing he was rubicund, which he was not, and ordering a flagon of wine to begin with. Airs of Provence or of Arcady blew his scraggly white locks about, and he wanted to know if "you be the gents Boylston's got to fetch."

Boylston! Fifty years came trooping back with that word. It had touched me long ago when I went to singing-school in the basement of the old stone church.

"I guess," said Charlie, "we shall have to foot it. How far is it to the Doctor's?"

"Goin' on two mile or thereabout. I reckon his team may hev got stuck," said the tavern-keeper. "Will yer step in and hev suthin'?"

We thanked him decorously, as if we owed him some kind of apology for breaking into his coun-

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try, and Charlie, who was an object of interest to several red-faced girls behind the adjacent blinds, whose "te-he's" escaped through the openings, remarked that it seemed to be a nice, quiet, agricultural country.

He was probably thinking of the girls in fleshings that he had left behind, and I merely said:—

"Yes, we shall miss the influence of those discreet women of the world who lend such a charm to real life, not alone by their graces, but by their wisdom."

He turned away with a little jerk as he said rather testily, "Oh, we didn't come down here, Dad, for that sort of thing."

"Certainly not," I replied. "So we'll just take a lung full of it and scurry back among our kind."

"I shouldn't think," he observed, "a man of your age would want to do so much scurrying. Now that you are here, you'd better make up your mind to stay awhile."

"You shall have it your own way, my boy, but I'll be hanged if I'll stay here alone."

Before we could exchange any further condolences, a stout, handsome equipage, drawn by a pair of high-stepping bays, came up, carrying Boylston on the front seat as easily as the Doctor had carried Union Pacific when it broke five points.

Boylston touched his hat and pointed with his whip. He evidently wasted no words on the obvious. It was late in the afternoon when we were

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once more rolling toward the Doctor's — this time at a gallant pace. Everything glistened and flashed, and the sweeping boughs now and then sprinkled us with iridescent drops.

"Sun-shower half an hour ago," said Boylston, and then relapsed into the general jingle of our ongoing.

We saw the drifting pigments of the shower scumbled in the west, in the gaps of the mountains, as we came out of the woods, roiled lakes of fire and blood and gold, with the evening shadows creeping upon them, but still throwing great shafts of colour over the vistas, so that the meadows were molten and the jutting crags were rimmed with crimson. And still the little brimming river, flashing in and out upon us with its deepening darks, like Nature's own corybant.

Just this dash through glades and groves, smitten now by the damp, odorous breath of a bottom, pink with the azaleas and wild rose, and spicy with the tender birch and sassafras, — and now coming head on into the full bluntness of the dying day, flying as if pursued by the scented evening, — and then, turning in at the gravelled walks of a park and coming all at once abreast of a large colonial house peering through the trees, on the broad veranda of which was grouped the last tableau into which our panorama had resolved itself with finishing magic.

Years had whitened but not denuded the Jovian head of the Doctor. Indeed, the frost of time was more like the jolly frost of a wedding cake

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that is made to keep, and his ruddy, frank face accepted the snow as a good picture of Ajax grown old will accept a new mat. Still as erect and hearty at seventy as that Mingo chief whose hunting lodge was once on this very spot, he held out his arms to us, laid his trip-hammer hand on Charlie's shoulder as if he expected him to bend a little in the knees, — which a father's pride may be pardoned for saying, parenthetically, he didn't, — and, turning him round as a recruiting sergeant might have done, said, in well-remembered tones: —

“Great Scott, and you are the young rascal I used to carry on my shoulder! Io, my dear, I present to you an old friend in our young guest. Polly, attention, eyes front! This is a serious business. Polly is my niece. Take him away, girls. He is reeking with city. Have him fumigated, and put him in the haunted chamber.”

Io and Polly were not to be driven out of their proper reserve by this gustiness, and Charlie, I observed, did not come to this part of the tableau so stoutly. I think the sudden apparition of unexpected loveliness rather took his breath away. However, I can only judge of the matter by myself. Some kind of a notion floated through my head swiftly enough that the Doctor had offered a prize for the handsomest girls in Mifflin County in order to strike us dumb, which notion was in ridiculous contrast to the matter-of-fact pair of them, who stood in the doorway, and tried their best to look as if the arrival of Charlies was of

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hourly occurrence, the novelty of which had long since worn off.

This part of the tableau melted away, after introductions, through the doorway, my contribution to it going humbly enough along, followed a little way by an old negro in a dress coat from another generation and race, which coat was very much wrinkled in the back. He carried a wisp broom, and I was left to be properly explained and generously exalted to the Doctor's sister, a quaint relic of other days, fragile and softly spoken, in sober, trim attire, with a pink flush in her cheeks, and a kindly sparkle behind her spectacles. So curiously like a delicate heirloom did she appear that one was a little afraid the Doctor's breeziness would knock off an edge, but one soon enough saw that the Doctor's bounce had long since been adapted to this gracious light of other days. She had a way of involuntarily putting two fingers over her lips just before speaking, as if her remoteness, so like the spirit of Tuskaloo, might become oppressive, which was rather aggravating, for I am sure that everybody wanted more of it, as he always does of a lost ideal. Something in the gray kerchief round her neck, but more in the soft, equable perspective of her manner, invested her with a far-away charm, as if some Quaker ancestor — perhaps Penn himself — had insisted on peeping out of her, with occasional "thees and thous," all the more delicious, like that kerchief, because they did not quite agree with the present. Her stately courtesy had something aerial about

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it, as if it were always seen through the haze of years; and it is worth saying here that, long as we stayed at the mansion, we never heard her called anything but "Mother" by each and all, not one of whom had any other than a tacit metaphor to stand upon excepting Io.

Some women bear with them, into old age, ancestral rights that make the whole world kin.

Thus were we landed softly enough, but to our glad amazement, into the manorial heart of Tuskaloo, where life went on with whelming gentleness, like that little river, making, as it seemed to me, green pastures and sweet cloistered demesnes, that, even to write about, now that I think about it, is perilously near to impertinence.

I suppose all fairly rounded out men — that is, rounded out by protean life itself — come in their ascending spirals to that point when it is no longer possible to go forward with their hopes without going backward with their desires. Heaven slowly shifts its position from the clouds and reappears behind us in the memory. But how few of us can retrace our steps or renew our zest. In this respect the Doctor loomed up to me as a favoured paragon, and I must have said something like this to him as we stood alone on that porch, he in a nankeen jacket, and I listening to the tinkle of a bell somewhere in wet meadows where the cows were coming home. But he blew me out with his hearty breath as if I had been a mere tuppenny dip of sentiment.

"Now, none of your confounded introspec-

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tions," he said, "I will not have it. Did you not notice my sign on the gate? — 'All analysts are forbidden to trespass on these grounds under penalty of the law' — the common law of healthy existence. You are hungry; why waste your breath? Dinner is waiting. I hear Bob ringing her voice."

The chateau air of that dinner was very perceptible, eaten, as it was, under wax candles in a wainscoted room that had once been white and gold and still had carvings that held up the mantle, over which hung a portrait of Logan in his war feathers. A coiffured picture or two on the walls seemed to be dimly dancing a dusky minuet in the candle-light as if they might be memorial shadows. The great gap between all this and all that which we had just left grew momentarily. But there was the tableau as if arranged at the board by Teniers himself, and, like all good pictures, carrying its own warning that all else was subsidiary. Io could not very well help being the focus of this group. My first impression of her was distinct and peculiar enough to be definitely recalled. It was one of those cases, common enough, I think, in which it is recognition that baffles you. Io I had certainly never met before, — indeed, had never heard of her, — and yet, the first time we looked at each other, I remembered her. Something in the beautiful face was familiar. It was not outline, but an evasive expression, an expression for which I can find no other word than that of familiarity. I suppose

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we all hold some qualities in common, and they shake spiritual hands when they meet.

I thought afterward, in trying to recall where I had seen anything like her, of a picture I had once observed attentively in the old Vernon Gallery in London. I believe it was by Copley, and the immature stateliness and tenderness of the white face, so simply framed in by soft brown hair, seemed to me at the time to be strangely fascinating. I have since looked at a print of that picture, and it was not at all like Io, which only shows how we carry an archetype in our minds, and go about placing it on other persons' canvases. Io looked nineteen. I learned afterward that she was much older. I felt sure, however, at the very start, that she did not know exactly how superior she was to the artistic eye. How could she, in that place, where there were no artists or flatterers to be always bothering her about the curve of that white neck or the pose of that head.

Have you not, now and then, met young women who appeared to be ignorant of their supreme endowment of personal charm? You reply—impossible. If they are not born self-conscious, they acquire self-consciousness from the atmosphere they breathe. True, but I only said appeared to be. Feminine charm is not declaratory, only suggestive.

As for Polly, I understood at once that she was indigenous. She and the Juniata came up together. A round, vital, effervescent, domestic

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soubrette, with a delightful snub nose on which two or three freckles had lit, and a red, restless mouth full of little white teeth, not made to bite, but merely to accent volubility, like the high lights in a clever oil painting.

To be made the principals in such a sextet, written, one might say, by Lully, but played by Liszt on a modern instrument, only seemed to heighten the necromancy of our introduction.

The Doctor was superbly patriarchal at the head of his table, without allowing his accumulative years to obscure his imperishable youthfulness of spirit. He had slipped somehow from a nankeen to a velvet jacket, and cast behind his chair that colonial shadow of a servitor, in a white apron and wrinkled, shad-bellied coat — as straight as self-respect and tradition could make him, and holding his waiter against his breast as he rolled up his eyes in patient decorum.

One felt at once that affection allowed the Doctor's full, galloping candour many liberties that would have been gruff but for the constant declaration of his face that they were merely temperamental extravagances. He informed us promptly that he was additionally glad we had come, for Polly's sake. Live men were necessary occasionally, like cold baths, to dispel the imaginary men. He really believed that Polly had begun to write poems to Boylston.

Whereupon Polly explained our host as a dear old reminiscence, who would be an inestimable uncle if he were not such a traditional doctor, and

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did not insist on continually treating his family as patients. "I never had a pulse in my life," said Polly, "that his finger wasn't on it."

"My dear," said the Doctor, with splendid amiability, "in old times we used to judge of a girl's condition by looking at her tongue. We no longer need to do that. We only have to listen to it."

Even Polly laughed while she replied, "I never wrote a poem in my life. I couldn't — besides, there is nobody here who would understand it."

"You did not need to," I observed, with what I thought was the proper courtliness of such a place, "you probably lived it, which was better."

Charlie and Io, who were directly opposite and ridiculously proper in their fear of each other, looked at me, I thought, with a little envy of my age that could say such things, and so I proceeded.

"Doctor," I said, "we set out for the wilderness, and have arrived at Mount Ida."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Just plain Tuskaloo — and Indian. I suppose you think you are on Mount Ida because you have Io in front of you. It isn't Grecian. It's wild western, and means that our goddess was born in Iowa — Cedar Rapids, wasn't it, my dear? They abbreviate everything out there except the girls themselves."

"That's just it," I answered. "Charlie and I set out to discover Arcady, and an Indian river flirted ahead of us and seemed to call out, 'This

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way, gentlemen, open your eyes and shut your mouths.' It would have reminded us of an actress, if your river had called itself the Tiber or the Rubicon."

Charlie gave me a quick, inquiring glance, but I flatter myself I preserved an innocent aspect, and Polly broke out:—

"Tibers are yellow," she said, "and Rubicons must be red. Fancy a river that is celebrated because somebody crossed it—who was it? I tried to paint the Juniata because it is always blue, and Uncle said I must get a multiscope. What is a multiscope? It sounds like a chorus."

"A multiscope, my dear," said the Doctor, "is a new invention for adding motion to meaning. They have to have even statuary on the jump in the large cities. The Juniata," he added, addressing himself to me, "is the only river that in its sources we have not annotated with canals. The Susquehanna always reminds me of a Biblical commentary with its marginal readings and footnotes. The travellers follow the stream as does a Biblical student, without touching it."

"When Uncle goes to Harrisburg," said Polly, "he wants a canoe, and would sit in the end of it wrapped in a blanket and rail at the world with a paddle. And he can't paddle a bit. I've tried him, and he upset me."

"So I never go to Harrisburg," replied the Doctor, with unfaltering good humour. "I wait, and if everything doesn't come to me at Tuska-loo, I count it gain."

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"My," observed Mother, as she pressed her fingers to her mouth and gave way to a mild footnote herself, "I am sure we should not have gained anything if our guests had not come."

"Oh, it's too early to judge," cried the Doctor. "Wait till we see how Polly acts."

Then we all laughed heartily, including Polly.

Late that night, when Charlie and I were alone, and had shut our defensive chamber doors on the circumambient hospitality, he looked at me quite seriously, and said:—

"Did you know of these girls, Dad, before we came?"

"As I hope for mercy, Comrade," I said, with unnecessary earnestness, "I never dreamed of them, much less heard of them, till this evening."

That seemed to clear his mental atmosphere of some kind of suspicion, and I added:—

"I don't think any dream would have approached the reality, my boy—do you?"

"Very charming, homelike ladies, I am sure," he replied. "I wonder if there's a post-office in Tuskaloo."

This kind of stubbornness aggravates a man of fifty. "Confound your cucumber soul, my boy," I exclaimed, "when I was your age I would have burst into a blaze of enthusiasm if an Io had crossed my path. Egad, sir, one did, and you're a living proof of it. Why, sir, at such a meteor, as Gray says:—

E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

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Go to. If I were as free as you are — ahem — I'd have a throne built in my imagination in half an hour for such a girl as that. Don't she remind you a little of Madame Coldcream in her poise of character? Perhaps you couldn't study her as well as I could."

The look of disgust that came into his face as he turned away induced me to soften my strain.

"Anyway," I said, "you must understand that it would be a blessed thing for our forlorn stock if we got such an ideal as that into it. Yes, sir, it's worth some self-sacrifice, and, by Jove, if I were a free man, I'd make the sacrifice, for I am not as blasé in my feelings as you are."

He walked away, and mumbled something to himself. I asked him what he was saying.

"I was only saying," he replied, as he sauntered out, "that if you look at it in that way, and there's got to be a sacrifice made, why not offer up Madame Coldcream?"

Then he was gone. I went to bed, where I lay for some time punching myself in my imaginary ribs, and wondering whether my Prospero or a Doctor had brought an Ariel or a Miranda to my assistance.



CHAPTER IV

THE ROSE BENCH

THE sun, coming up at a most unreasonable hour, poked a sharp yellow shaft at me through the rose vines, and seemed to be calling my attention to the bird clamour under my window. The curtains at the sash were waving indolently into the room, sending heavy billows of incense at me. I looked about me, and tried to recall just where I was. For some time the reality of my environment appeared to be a part of a slowly receding dream, and by the time I had reached the window and had made out my bearings, I became pleasantly conscious that I had really awakened in a new world. I listened. Nothing was stirring, evidently, but the birds. I went to the adjoining room softly. My heir and companion in intrigue was sleeping soundly in a luxuriant sprawl, his

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half-draped figure looking white and rather graceful, I thought, in the dewy dusk of the recess.

I dressed myself and slipped down the stairs noiselessly. The house had the air of always standing wide open. I walked through the hall and out of the open door into the fresh morning, saying to myself, somewhat exultingly, that the man from the city was the early bird after all. I looked at my watch. It was just five o'clock. The sun for a week, I learned afterward, rose through the Tuscarora Gorge, and gave that special charm of dawn that makes the shadows long and the wet fields prismatic.

I stood a moment in the gravelled path, a little bewildered by the blazonry of the hour, trying to adjust my faculties to the newness and freshness of it, unconsciously taking deep breaths, as a mammal might that is suddenly launched into an unaccustomed atmosphere.

By degrees the sumptuous and intoxicating beauty of it became intelligible, to my eye at least, as I measured some of the details. The same old artist was at work, — I say "old" with some hesitation, — but surely those were not the old pigments. Or does the Great Artist, always working with the same pigments, have moods like his feeble imitator, and sometimes transmute and transform the materials with a new mastery of affection?

I took off my hat as if to let the cool, rose-scented air come to the assistance of my brain,

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and stood there, feeling that I was turning from a bewildered artist to a reverent worshipper.

Thus it is, I said to myself, that the Master continues to plant gardens eastward in Eden, and a river still goes out to water the garden and compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.

Having returned this borrowed tribute where it belonged, I put my hat on, and was about to stride aimlessly through the grass, when there — shall I say rose up, or descended, or merely developed like a figure on a film? — a thing in a tucked-up petticoat and tilted chip hat, showing Arcadian ankles in red stockings, dew-stained I swear, and carrying a little basket on her arm, as jauntily as if she had been picking airy pippins in the garden of the Hesperides.

It was Polly.

I never knew dew and sunrise and ether and bird songs to come together on their own account, but out stepped a Polly like a melody when the instrument and the Master were ready. Generally she is as impalpable and evanescent as the filmies that flout themselves behind all symphonies. But this time she was indubitable, dew-bedraggled, making a shadow of her own, like a French silhouette, on the wet June grass, — which I am sure a filmy never does, — and holding down two measurable spots in the clover with her little buckled shoes.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle," I said, my politeness and my astonishment going off together with an impromptu French alacrity.

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"My," she said, "I did not expect to meet you so early! I must look like a tramp. Have you had your coffee?"

"Coffee?" I repeated with considerable disdain, and making an absurd inflation as if a man of my age could live on rose-scented air. "I have been taking my Clicquot in a supernal bath, and I fancy I got ahead of coffee this morning."

"How stupid not to have told you. You came out the back way!"

"I believe I did, if there is a back way."

"And the coffee is in the front hall. I will walk round and show it to you. Then you will know better next time."

"Delighted. Let me carry your basket."

"No. I will leave it at the kitchen as we go round. I gathered them at the Swirl."

It was full of mushrooms.

Having deposited her basket at the kitchen door, she led me to the front veranda, her little heels clattering ahead of me, and inside the wide-open hall door, on a small table, was a steaming urn of coffee with a spirit lamp under it, and beside it a tray of cups, a sugar bowl, and a jug of cream.

"Everybody comes out this way in the morning," she said, "and takes his coffee as he passes. It is the Doctor's rule. You will have no excuse for breaking it again."

Then she held a cup under the silver tap and handed me the black product daintily, pointing as she did so to the cream jug and the sugar; and,

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before I knew it, she had excused herself and flitted up the broad staircase.

I stood there a moment stirring my coffee contemplatively, wondering at the extra flavour of it, and feeling rather proud of my early achievement, when I saw the tray of abandoned cups with the spoons in them, and it occurred to me for the first time that the family had all preceded me, and having passed the coffee ordeal, had gone on somewhere silently into the mazes of outdoors.

As there was a box of perfecto cigars on the table, with the lid invitingly open, I helped myself, and strolled out upon the front veranda; and presently Polly, in dry shoes and stockings, — the stockings having undergone some kind of sea change to a sober gray, — came out, and catching hold of my arm as I strode up and down, promptly and unconcernedly kept step rhythmically and colloquially.

"He has been up an hour," she said. "He and Boylston went to Tuskaloo for the mail. Where did Mr. Charles go?"

"Go?" I said. "He has no go in him at this hour. He is fast asleep in his room."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "Let's wake him up. That's his window over the rose bench. We can throw things up at him."

I pulled her arm a little closer through mine. We were walking quite vigorously up and down on the veranda, and there is some kind of luxury in having a girl keep step with you buoyantly while she hangs on to you. (So many of them

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add a drag instead of wings.) Such a girl converts a solo of motion into a duet of delight.

"Perhaps he is timid," I said, "and it would not help matters if you made a demonstration."

"Yes," she replied; "he is quite young, isn't he?"

It is a curious feminine phenomenon that girls regard all boys of their own age as being peculiarly young.

"Besides," I said, "there is nothing to throw, unless we take the bricks out of the foundation."

With that she drew her arm away, skipped off the end of the veranda, and, pulling at the great masses of roses that hung over the stone bench, twisted the stems together deftly, making a clumsy bouquet, and then dexterously shot it into the upper window.

As I stood at the step, laughing at this exhibition of girlishness, she caught up another handful of the plentiful blooms, and just as she threw it, Charlie appeared at the window in a bath robe, pinned together over his breast by a live fist, and received the morning message full in the face, where, like a friendly bombshell, it burst into a thousand leaves, that came fluttering and whirling in a descending shower upon the rose bench, at which the picturesque maiden executed a stage courtesy, and cried out, in imitation of me:—

"Bon jour, monsieur. Shall I have your coffee sent up, with the cream of the morning on it, or will you come down?"

And Charlie, unable to grasp the true sportive-

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ness of it at once, retired from view, wiping the dew from his face without making reply.

This incident served to pave the way — shall I say with rose leaves? — to Polly's character, though it is unjust to her to suppose that she so intended it. I think one clings to such a delightful indifference to the usual methods of establishing an intimacy, and I was saying to myself, "Oh, ho! that's the kind of witch you are, is it?" when she flitted away the bank of petals on the rose bench with her skirt, and beckoned me to come and sit down beside her.

"I suppose," she said, "he will think I am a dreadfully rude sort of person. Everybody does at first."

"Excuse me," I replied, sitting down beside her, "not everybody."

"What do *you* think? You expected to meet a lady, of course. I suppose it is a shame."

"What is?"

"I am."

"Why do you wish to disagree with me at the first jump?"

"Tell me about him" (sticking her index finger up at Charlie's window). "Did you bring him down here, or did he bring you?"

I confess that this incredible and instinctive leap of the witch's apprehension startled me. I looked at her with indulgent surprise, wondering what kind of divination was lurking under that chip hat and trim, round bodice.

"Why don't you tell me all about it?" she asked.

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"My dear Polly —"

"I wish you wouldn't call me Polly."

"What shall I call you?"

"Call me Bob. Everybody here does. It saves time."

"I cannot imagine who invented that atrocious and ill-fitting name for you."

"Why, HE, of course."

"He?"

"The Doctor. He is HE. We couldn't be calling him Doctor all the time."

"So my old friend has become a pronoun!"

"HE used to call me Bobolink, then it got shortened to Bob. It was very absurd, because, as I told Him, if I was a real bobolink, you couldn't keep me here in the winter. Guess what HE said. Oh, yes, we could, Birdie—in a cage. How would you like to be kept in a cage in winter?"

"I fancy I might like it if it belonged to such a HE."

"At first I retaliated and called Io Ike, but somehow it wouldn't stick to her, though I am sure Ike has a truer Greek ring than Io, hasn't it? If one stops to think of Io, one wants to add 'sometimes W and Y.' What do people call you, who are familiar? 'Mister' is dreadfully clumsy."

"Nobody treated me with true familiarity till I met you — except Charlie, and he calls me Comrade sometimes."

"How perfectly childlike and lovely. It's

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almost as endearing as 'Old Chap.' I suppose you wouldn't care to have *me* call you 'Old Chap.'"

"No, you couldn't get the right swagger. Women never do. Now tell me, what made you think that either of us brought the other?"

When one asks this kind of a creature to tell him what makes her think, he baffles her. She is not yet quite sure that she does think at all. At all events this young woman did not stop to think, she went right along.

"It is so unusual," she said, "for young men to stick to their fathers and keep their eyes on them all the time."

"Oh, I assure you he will not be able to keep his eyes on me all the time down here. I should think you would know that."

"You felt that way about it, did you, before you came?"

Then we both looked at each other a moment as if worldly wisdom and inscrutable ingenuousness would like to shake hands, but did not know how to go about it.

"HE is awfully transparent sometimes, but HE doesn't know it, so HE cannot help letting the cat out of the bag."

While I was trying to separate these metaphors and pronouns, she rattled on:—

"'Bob,' says HE, 'an old friend of mine is coming here; try and behave yourself. I have special reasons for making it as pleasant as possible for him. He brings his son with him—a

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fine young man.' 'Oh,' says I, 'is he the special reason?' 'If you don't behave yourself,' says HE, 'I'll pack you off while they are here.' 'Then,' says I, 'they will not stay.' 'Confound your impudence!' says HE. 'Do you think you are the special reason for everything that takes place in this house? I wish you to understand that there is somebody else in this establishment.' 'Oh,' says I, 'is SHE the special reason? Glory!' Then HE takes down the dog whip from the mantel and begins to flourish it, and I skip out to see him hanging it up again and shaking all over with laughter. I do like a man who can be brutally candid. *You* can, can't you? Is *Io* the special reason?"

"Look here, Bob," said I, adapting myself to her familiarity without the slightest effort, "you have gone quite ahead of the facts with your fervid fancy. Neither I nor Charlie knew of the existence of *Io* till we got here. It is a humiliating confession, but I never even heard of you."

"I wonder why HE didn't tell you in advance."

"I don't believe HE saw the burning importance of it."

"Do you?"

"Well, I'm beginning to."

"Who is it important to?" (sticking her finger up in the air again). "I suppose you think he is handsome, don't you?"

"A father's opinion is of no account. What do you think?"

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"Oh, I think he is so-so. But I don't cut any ice. Why cannot men be simple and candid when they cease to be so very young?"

"I am not so very old, Bob," I protested.

"No, you don't seem to be as old as you must be. You see, I was not sent off to Harrisburg to be fitted with new dresses because you were coming."

"That is a compliment; you didn't need to be."

"You mean that I was not a need of the occasion."

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind. There wasn't any special occasion."

"Then what did HE mean by 'special reasons'?"

"HE is an old chum of mine, and he wanted to keep me as long as possible, I suppose. Do you think that you are following his directions now?"

"I am trying to find out how to follow them."

By this time I was beginning to readjust my opinion of Polly's intuition, and to suspect that she had obtained a glimpse of my letter to the Doctor. "Perhaps," I said, "HE only wanted to warn you against your reckless curiosity. You are trying to make yourself believe that we came down here for a flirtation. Fancy running away from a city full of women — and such women — to get up a flirtation where there are only two women."

"And such women," added Polly. "People

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sometimes run away to avoid a flirtation, don't they?"

This was too much. She had certainly seen my letter to the Doctor, so I said: —

"Very well. Suppose it was true, how can you help the matter by proving that we have jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire?"

And then this incorrigible minx, with her chip hat nearly over one eye, looked at me without a tremor and said: —

"Tell me about the frying-pan."

I returned her look with what her confounded divination must have seen was admiration, and while I was considering if I should not make a clean breast of it, she said: —

"You are really a much meaner man at bottom than you look to be — one of those smiling men who like to torment a girl by looking confidential, and acting like a long-distance telephone."

"Bob," I said, "you are too old for your age, and as I am altogether too young for mine, we are going to have considerable trouble in adjusting ourselves to each other."

This was an obvious evasion, and it was like a worm talking sophistry to the woodpecker.

"Of course, you know that Charles, now that he is here, will fall in love with Io," she said.

"Then I should have to take him away, for it would be very indiscreet on his part."

At this she leaned over to look up into my face, as if she had the power of peeping behind my words. I could feel the pry of her bright

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eyes. "Then you do take him away from places when he is indiscreet, don't you?" And then suddenly she exclaimed: "Gracious me, you must think I am an impertinent gossip. When you and HE get your heads together, how my ears will burn!"

"Bob, I am quite willing to acknowledge that you are a delightful little gossip," I said. "But you must not conclude that everybody else is."

"Oh, you will sit here together; this is HIS judgment seat, where HE smokes HIS pipe and looks like Solomon and tries to talk like Carlyle, and you will both tear me limb from limb. You will say, 'What kind of a girl is that Bob?' She tried to make a confidant of me at the first clip, and, by Jove!' — you say 'By Jove!' don't you? — 'by Jove! I'll be hanged if she didn't come within an ace of it, too!' And HE will say, 'Oh, don't bother with Bob — we have other fish to fry. Let her hop round and pick up a worm or two and twitter. Twitter, my dear sir, is one of the harmless embellishments of retirement.'"

I listened to this vivacity with indulgent admiration. Her heedless volubility and piquant sauciness were suggestive truly of a bobolink.

"Yes," I said, like the boy who is having his fortune told, "then what will I say?"

"Oh, you will look a little tired, and say, 'Oh, Bob is all right, and, by Jove! sir, if she wasn't so confounded old, I'd make love to her myself.'"

At this point, as we were both looking into

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each other's eyes, it was quite natural that we should both tumble into a common laugh, just as two streams coming from opposite directions will fall over the same precipice.

This little attorney, I was saying to myself, with her bill and her plumage, will make quick work of my unsophisticated lad. There will not be a family secret that she will not use as a perch on which to twitter.

Just then the Doctor's resonant voice broke in upon us pleasantly as he drove up to the rear entrance.

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Bob, jumping up. "You and I will go off to the Swirl as soon as we get our breakfast. You must see the Swirl first of all, and I must show it to you. Shall I?"

"Must I see the Swirl?"

"Certainly, and you must see it with me before you and HE get your heads together."

"Agreed," I said helplessly, as I followed her through the hall, to find Charlie a little apart at the balustrade reading a tiny blue letter, and the Doctor and Boylston unloading packages from the vehicle. Bob rushed at Charlie impetuously, with the one purpose, I am sure, of seeing how he would act with the letter, and saluted him apologetically.

"Good morrow, Mr. Charles. I was unpar-donably rude at your window."

"It was nothing, I assure you," said my absurd son, flushing up as if he felt the blow of the

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roses anew, looking at me nervously, and ramming the letter into his side pocket as if it were stolen money. "I rather liked it, you know," he said.

"Yes, I might have put your eyes out."

"Here, Bob," cried the Doctor. "Take these packages up to Io's room, and don't you untie them until after breakfast."

"You see," he said, addressing himself to me, as if an apology were necessary for his morning jaunt, "these days are so precious that we piece them out at the top with an extra hour or two of coiffure. They are like those old dames who used to make themselves longer with their head-dresses."

As he was speaking Io appeared at the door, with the family Mother behind her like a shadow, holding a finger to her lip. Off went all the hats, down to Boylston, as if the courtly hours with their coiffures of dawn made ancient gallants of us all.

"I must have overslept myself," said Io, looking resplendently demure in her long morning wrap, as if she had broken a law of the establishment by not having her eyes open at sunrise.

"You always do, my lady," said the Doctor, whose gallantry relapsed at once into his customary hearty badinage. "I'm going to put a sunrise gun under your window."

"Do you think it necessary, Uncle, when you can come under it yourself?" asked Io, without parting with her demureness.

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There was a moment or two in which we exchanged prim morning compliments, rather stately beside the conversation from which I had just escaped, and then the Doctor drove us all in to breakfast, *sans cérémonie*, but not before I had the opportunity of admiring Io with some reference to particulars.

I am afraid my appraisal may have been somewhat unjust, as it was certainly inadequate; but it seemed to me, as I felt the morning impression made by the handsome girl, that Nature, in bending all its efforts to execute a *chef d'œuvre* of physical perfection, must have overlooked some other essentials. Experience alone teaches a man that these superb examples of femininity are generally consummated at a sacrifice of some internal qualities. Nature never tries to do two things at once. If she sets out to make a bewilderingly lovely woman, she seems to forget everything else, and her product is very apt to forget everything else too. I found myself trying to extricate my admiration by means of my reason. What is it such external perfection lacks? It must lack something or it would not be human; for Nature, that succeeds in making paragons, never accomplishes miracles.

Io's eyebrows were especially coercive. They were insistent parabolas that were like the signature of the great artists, a finishing flourish of completeness, as if the last curve in the picture should be a summary of all the others — occult Oriental arches sprung over mysterious chambers,

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that turn out to be all labyrinths, hard to interpret, and from which it is impossible to escape.

I noticed that she dropped the lids at my scrutiny, as if I were an archæologist who was familiar with the Sanscrit of beauty, and might read into the hieroglyphs their true meaning, to discover that this madonna face was the ever recurring illusion.

But, bless her soul, imbedded as it was in so much perfection of form and colour, I was thinking of my good fortune in having met with something that would bring my young prodigal's sensibilities back to the natural path. If I had possessed the true Oriental magic, I might have called into existence, for my own fatherly purposes, something of this kind, with just that soft brown hair, always restrained a little this side of revelry, and that mild, wondering, receptive look of bottomless eyes, and that half-luminous whiteness of neck and face. I might not have accomplished the eyebrows, for they, I acknowledged, were beyond magic; but here it was, all made to order, put up in dainty habiliments, and saying, "Here I am; you conjured me with your talismanic imagination — what will you do with me?"

All this was palpable fate. I had looked it. Charlie and I had plunged toward it, as dull iron plunges to a magnet. Polly had perceived it with a bobolink's instinct, just as a bird perceives the approach of the inevitable spring before it is in sight.

So I exulted secretly, as a fond, conniving father

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might, saying to himself: "So, so, my boy, your city hallucination will dog us to the edge of Eden with blue letters, will she? You refuse to burn your bridges behind you, do you? All right, my young master. Now that I have Aladdin's lamp, we shall see, you handsome and overweening young idiot!"

A father who has reason and foresight and affection on his side never feels quite confident until eyebrows come to his assistance.

I leave out the Doctor's exordium on breakfasts in general, and my own vivid remembrance of that breakfast in particular. I believe he said something about the meal needing a portico of approach, with white Hours, like the ambulatory of a classic temple. One must come up the steps in the morning to a breakfast, with a bevy of the Appetites in attendance, as if going to a festival with obedient nymphs.

He always would make these Icarian flights — how well I remembered them of old! But I noticed that his jolly household held it to be a duty to melt his wings with indulgent indifference. Mother was always deliciously malapropos, and on this occasion wanted to know if the omelette was just right, and Io, beautifully recreant to her Athenian origin, spoke of Johnny-cake; and my restrained son remarked, with what I thought was an inspiration of imbecility, that Johnny-cake must be a souvenir of the Civil War — were not the Southerners called Johnnies? Whereupon Polly put the finishing touch on this episode by saying: —

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"That is so; and the Northern soldiers clutched after the cakes so voraciously that they were called 'Yanks.'"

At which everybody laughed except Mother and Io, one of whom was not nimble enough to follow Polly's impertinence, and the other of whom did not include hearty laughs in her stately repertory. But the Doctor descended gracefully to his familiar level:—

"You shall enjoy yourselves this morning in your own way. There are horses if your city bones are not too brittle; and if they are, there are vehicles. You shall expend your exuberance in flying nowhither joyously. I shall leave you to the tender mercies of these women, and may Heaven have pity on your souls, for I must look after the men in the fields until eleven o'clock."

"We have made our programme," said Polly.

"We go to the Swirl."

"We?" they all said in polyphonic chorus.

"Yes, we. Eh, Comrade?"

"Polly," said Mother, "try and restrain your familiarity. Our guests do not yet understand you."

"Oh, don't mind Bob," said the Doctor. "Our guests will have other fish to fry. Bob's all right."

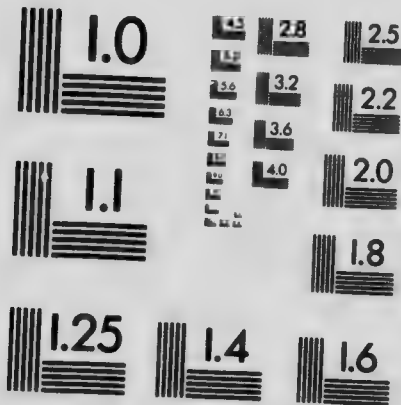
"What did I tell you?" said Polly, in my ear.

"Bob," I whispered, bending down to let everybody see just how familiar we were, "you are a witch. Whatever you say, I'll swear to."



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CHAPTER V

THE SWIRL

SO Polly and I went out together into the morning.

The dewy brightness of it seemed to obliterate the distance that years had placed between us.

She put her little hand in mine on the stones in the wet meadow, saying that she would lead me, for she knew them all. And so, through brambly ways, noisy with the early birds that lent their trilllets to every spray and bending sweet flag, we climbed the banks and waded through the blooms into aisles of old trees, vernal groined and fretted by the early architect of sunrise, and suddenly stood on the edge of the Swirl.

Once, in that unpremeditated walk, we came upon a rug woven of star mosses and cryptogamous threads in Persian brightness, and spread in

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cushiony pile round a tulip tree that canopied it with protective sprawl, and I turned to look back at the American chateau, poking its dormers and chimneys out of the near green perspective, and tipped here and there, like a Damascus kiosk, with the glittering old gold of the morning.

In that glancing retrospect I must have given way to the necromancy of it impotently. There lay the fairy mansion, softly wrapped in the illusion of the hour, wholly out of the world of work-a-day stress, and having passed its portals and seen the sleeping beauty, I felt like the tired worker who throws himself upon a couch and gives way to the sweet beguilement of his own fancy.

From this nepenthe of the senses I was whisked back by Polly under the tulip tree, holding her skirt deftly lifted, her buckled shoes almost hid in the cushiony rug.

"This was certainly laid to be danced on," she said. "I never come here myself without feeling its appeal to my toes."

And with that she began to pirouette, her gray stockings twinkling over the green moss, as you may have seen a pair of butterflies flit and flutter across an everglade.

While I was indulgently regarding this picturesque impulse, gone off like a cadenza in the middle of a duet, she caught me by the hand and pulled me upon the enchanted tapestry, saying, "You must remember some steps of a gavotte. It goes like this, doesn't it?"

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Whereupon she began to whistle some kind of a quaint improvised air, stepping out with inimitable mock courtesy and I handing her about with an impromptu ceremoniousness, that, now I think of it, was very absurd.

These wayward moments are lapses into a primitive and healthy spontaneity, and I suppose all men experience at some time the delicious youthful retrocession, when they let go of themselves, and sit at the feet of Scheherezade hours. The filaments that lead us are very fine. A couplet, a stave of fugitive music, an act of the romantic play, a wandering odour, a confidential fairy in a chip hat and buckled shoes — and away we go from the beaten track, into the old labyrinths, sunny and tangled, where at some time we sported with a divine listlessness.

It is no use trying to outgrow the souvenirs of the heart. They are not hung like fading pictures on the walls of our memory. They are imbedded like fossils in the crystal tissues of our lives, and they come to light at the touch of passing showers or the disintegrating finger of time itself. But we never think of this till afterward, when the witch light has gone out, and the stark facts of existence look at us from the shelves where we have arranged them.

Such an improvised picture as Polly had made was as fluctuant as the images on a running stream. She could be Bayadère or Maintenon only in flashes, and to whistle was to start from every pensile branch about us a new tumult of shrill

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protest, that made her strike an attitude of frolicsome astonishment and put her hand over her mouth as if she had tumbled inadvertently in among all the strings of the outdoor instrument. We both drew ourselves up into laughing statues, and then went on to the Swirl.

By this time Polly had prepared my indolence to accept any illusion at her sportive beck. She had but to crook her arm or toss her head, and it should be Helicon or the Fountain of Youth. It is so comfortable to give over your volition and be wafted by Caprice.

But no perennial river of song in Macedonia or in the mirage that beckoned to 'once de Leon could, I feel sure, so outleap the fancies with affluent reality as did the Juniata at the Swirl. Of all the capers of the protean stream none could be so overwhelmingly sleek and copious as this. It came sinuously through slanting meadows, roistering over stones, to a great deep pool, and then, pouring over the ledge that could not restrain it, turned in a short curve and came smoothly and silently down to us in a great, glassy, sherry-brown volume, scarcely broken by a ripple and flecked only by spots of foam, holding its breath, as one might say, as it slid between the limestone 'twiceway to break out exulting in the wider pool below with sudden and pleasant glee. A little distance up the bank, at the first pool, there was a summer house, pagoda-fashioned, so close to the water that its lattices were duplicated below; and when I expressed some surprise at

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finding it so conveniently poised over the still waters, not unlike a heron with its wings folded, Polly informed me that it was a bath-house, and I learned that the nymphs, here partly disrobed, and flinging themselves into the little lake, went unresistingly over the spillway into the sliding stream, and down the sluice, to be tossed into the foam below, where, I could easily imagine, there would be much flashing of white limbs in "dolphin tumults" mingled with blithe laughter.

It was there at the Swirl that I began the most extraordinary flirtation of my life. Extraordinary in that it was divested of all the dangers that usually accompany such a performance. Polly seemed bent on presenting to me her volatile nature in its entirety, and managing with rare unconsciousness to identify it with the aspects of vernal nature around her. But I felt the protection of a certain incongruity in it, and thought there was no more danger of my falling in love with her at my age than of falling into the Juniata upon whose grassy banks we sat and discoursed, and had either accident happened, I should probably have regained my footing, and, after shaking myself as became an experienced man of the world, would have gone back from the episode to my tramway of propriety. But, nevertheless, I was wheedled into a pleasant admiration of the unceremonious and ingenuous girl, that may have been as æsthetic as it is possible for one's emotions to become without quite arriving at the voluptuous.

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We sat there on the step of the rustic pagoda, and as she chattered aimlessly but interestingly, I wondered if the charm of sprightliness and guilelessness would make the same appeal to an inexperienced young man that it did to me.

One gives way supinely to an authority of graciousness, especially when it is sportive. This minx had had her own way without protest. My own plans, whatever they were, had somehow been softly superseded. I had promised myself a confidential consultation with the Doctor, and there I was whipped off at the start most aimlessly, sitting on the bank with new and unexpected confidences opening to me, as my companion threw buttercups into the stream to see them glide away like receding spots of sunshine.

But why should I hesitate to declare that the way of a man of fifty with a maid differs widely from the way of a man of nineteen. It is generally held by the world (and universally acted upon by the maids themselves, I believe) that the man of fifty is altogether more susceptible; and, while I am not prepared to deny it, I shall insist to my latest breath that the man of fifty keeps one eye open on his own susceptibility, which the man of nineteen never does.

What, I asked myself, in a running aside, as I watched the buttercups one after the other go the same way and lose themselves in the voiceless torrent, — what is the way of a *maid* with a man of fifty? Why should she make it apparent that she had gone out of her way to touch my suscep-

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tibilities? Why should she insist on going off with me before I was fairly domiciled, and dancing a gavotte with me before the dew was off. Were there no beds to make or rooms to be aired? Was it part of the understood policy of the establishment to beguile the fathers who had sons, so that the Princess would be undisturbed in her fascinating?

I think Polly had an instinctive sense that a man of my age was liable to consider, for she had a way of darting in and out of the conversation as if she wished to prevent it, and even a man of fifty, thus warned, feels that it is somewhat impertinent to consider,—very much, in fact, it appears at such times, like analyzing a woman's dress.

"Well," she said suddenly, "we are not going to sit here all the morning, are we?"

I think she felt that she was better protected when she was in motion. So up she jumps with a pretty little impatience.

"There's the neighbourhood, you know. Aren't you interested in the place?"

"Are there then really neighbours?" I asked.

"Heaps," she replied, following it with a quick look as if she might have inadvertently dropped a clew of patois.

"I mean lots," she added.

"Lots?" I repeated, trying to fix the word to its proper geographical origin.

"Well, piles."

And having heaped each absurd colloquialism

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on the other, she fell to laughing at my inability to sort them.

"I suppose," she said, "you thought we kept neighbours off with acres. I suppose the Doctor did intend to, but it doesn't work. When I first came here I felt just as you do. I used to look out my window in the morning and scream for Boylston to come and do something human, and he often came and performed on the hoe or a wheelbarrow just to relieve my mind. So much Nature was like those hideous hoop-skirts the women used to wear, it kept everybody at arms' length. But, dear me, I soon found out what a goose I was. There are neighbours hiding in all the woods and hills. Over near the Clove there's the Big Game Hunting Club from New York. Up on the slope of the Black Log spur there's the Juniata Valley Camp. Then there's the Philadelphia Trout Club's house on the Sprawl. Are you good at walking? because, if you are, I'm going to ask you to climb the side of the Clove some day with me, just to smell the rose fields in Perry County when the wind is sou'-sou'east. You'd think there wasn't a man within gunshot, wouldn't you — I mean an eligible man."

"Yes, I was falling into that pleasing fantasy — or perhaps it was a hope that the country produced nothing but girls. It would certainly be more consistent on the part of the country."

She slipped her arm into mine, and as we walked along the bank of the stream imparted a secret.

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"I'll tell you something mysterious," she said, "if you will promise not to mention it."

"On my sacred word and honour," I replied.

"Io has the power of conjuring men out of the earth. It's the funniest thing you ever saw. When we go off for a gallop together along the Tuscaloos Pike, they rise out of the ground in knickerbockers and slip out of the woods in hunting jackets, and come tearing along on horseback with their hats in their hands. I have tried it alone in all kinds of ribbons, and whistled and yodled, but not a man turned up. Why, sometimes there are so many horses hitched at our fence that people must think there's a vendue."

Then my Mistress Caprice fell to laughing, and having renewed her breath by that operation, went on:—

"When the Keystone State Trout Club built their bungalow they made the Doctor honorary member, and when the big game fellows had their park and club-house finished, they met Io on the road one day, and then they stopped fishing and put in a grand piano and a harp and mandolins and things, and then wanted the Doctor to become one of the directors, and sent a deputation in fine clothes to wait on him and ask him if he had anybody who knew anything about pianos. Now, if there is anything the Doctor hates, it's sport. He hates it almost as much as he does subterfuge."

"What did the Doctor say to the disinterested request?"

"He just said, 'Tush, tush, boys,' and went

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on smoking his brier-wood pipe. Don't *you* want to smoke? Gentlemen usually do when they walk, and they seem to be more at ease when they do."

"That is heaven's truth, Bob, but I came off without my cigar case."

"Wait a moment. I took one of the cigars as I came out of the hall. I suppose I've smashed it all to smithereens. No. Here it is," producing the article from a little pocket, along with a square pad of handkerchief, two or three curl papers, and some half-melted peppermints.

"Of course you haven't a match. Let me light it."

"Wait a moment," I said, "till I get the peppermint off."

And then up went one buckled shoe, a little detonation on the sole of it, and she was holding the match to the cigar in my mouth, while I made stertorous efforts to do my part, and noticed what a pretty little hand she had, and how daintily her little finger stood out like the curlicue at the end of a girl's signature.

"Now you feel more comfortable, don't you?"

"Bob," I said, "if you don't supervise it too much, my comfort will just amble along disinterestedly like yours."

At that she drew in her under lip quickly and looked up. She was trying to catch the exact import of my remark, and drew her arm away, saying:—

"I'm too familiar on short acquaintance. I know it, and it isn't becoming."

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"On the contrary, it is one of the several delightful things that I admire in you," I said, replacing her arm. "I especially like a girl who knows how to whistle a gavotte. I'll wager she is old-fashioned enough to say her prayers and eat raspberry jam on bread, and sing Aufer and Donizetti without a shrink. Do you know, your familiarity puts me in mind of sweetbriar in an antique vase. It always seems to be trying to get out and can't."

"Usually it is so tedious, when one is making the first visit, to get to be sociable," she remarked. "It's like going to hear a brilliant preacher and have to undergo a tedious service first. You sing standing up, and then you sing sitting down, and then somebody offers you part of his hymn-book, and you hold fast to it and keep your mouth shut for fear he will smell the peppermint."

"Well, Bob," I said with a laugh, "I have to thank you for coming at the sermon directly. Hav'n't you noticed how completely I have avoided the bashfulness and awkwardness that usually make men of my age so formal and stiff?"

"You wouldn't like to run me a race to those hayricks, would you, just for the fun of it?"

"No," I said, after considering the proposition. "If some of the field hands or sportsmen should see me chasing you, they might shoot me before the situation was explained."

It must have been an hour or two later when we came suddenly upon the little river again, now brawling with shallow merriment over a sandy bar, between green, sloping banks, dotted here and

THE SWIPL

there on the other side with sleek, sleepy cows that regarded us with an almost cultivated superiority. Across the dry meadow and in among the alders and gums there glinted the white clapboards of a house. Polly was suddenly seized with an irrepressible desire to be on the other side. She was sure Io and Charlie, if they had gone off for a gallop, would stop at the Lodge, as she called it.

"Dear me," she said, "why didn't we cross at the bridge two miles below and come up on the other side? Would you mind wading over? I don't think anything of it. It isn't over one's ankles. Of course it's perfectly ridiculous — men at your age don't wade."

I listened to this challenge with such mature bravado as I could summon. Had I been young, and not yet beyond the habitual idiocy of wading and climbing and sprinting with no conceivable purpose, I should no doubt have disdainfully laughed at her proposal as an altogether superfluous test of acknowledged hardihood. But a man at my age has to reckon with a mature vanity that cannot be trifled with, and be ready to authenticate his perennial youth and brawn at the slightest provocation.

"Bob," I said, "why should we both wade, when I can carry you over?"

Such a self-confident assertion I felt sure would quench her recklessness effectually. To my surprise she said promptly: —

"Will you?"

I sat down on the grass and began untying my

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heavy shoes, and getting my trousers rolled up. "I certainly will," I said, "unless you escape me."

She was poised on one foot not ten feet away, in involuntary suspense between flight and astonishment—a fine feminine astonishment that anybody could have the hardihood to take her at her word.

"I'm heavier than you think," she said.

"Perhaps," I replied, with grim complacency, as I looked at my stockinged feet. "But I am stronger than you imagine."

She was a gamey girl, after all. She let me pick her up in my two arms, and I walked into the water, carrying her nurse fashion, her little buckled shoes hanging down pendulously. The stretch of shallows was only thirty-five or forty feet wide, a clear, sandy reach, with a ten or twelve inch film of sweet water racing over it; and if I did not step into a hole, or run a flint through my foot, I would deposit my burden on the opposite bank as triumphantly indifferent as if my life had been in training for it. But before I was half-way across I became aware that my burden was quite a hundred and thirty-five pounds avoirdupois, and I was wondering to myself where these airy creatures hide all their solidity, when she said:—

"What do you suppose people would think if they saw you carrying me about the country in this fashion?"

"If you don't keep still," I panted, "I'll drop

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you in the middle of the stream. This is getting serious."

And at that her free arm went round my neck, rather tightly I thought.

"You can't," she cried. "I'm going to hang on to you like grim death. Heavens — wait a moment."

"What's the matter?"

"You are not a Baptist preacher, are you?"

"No; but I will be if you don't keep still."

"I am trying to make myself light."

"That's all right. But when I am trying to get you over one shallow stream, it isn't fair to add another. Besides, you are choking me."

"What do you suppose Charlie would say," she continued, "and I haven't known you twenty-four hours. Don't you think you had better take me back again? it's becoming awfully scandalous."

Then she gurgled, or perhaps it was the water running through my ankles. I did not at the moment stop to investigate it closely. There were ten feet more of wading to do, and, as I stepped out for the bank, Charlie and Io rode soberly out of the trees, and drew up in very allowable astonishment at the spectacle.

Io's first impression was that Polly was drowned, and that I was dragging her ashore like a retriever, so the beauty gave a shrill gasp; but when I had set my burden down on the bank, it jumped to its feet and declared that it was as dry as the Doctor's best wine, to which I could only add exultingly, "and just as full of life."

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This was literally true, and all the more obvious just at that moment, for the reason that the two equestrians were doing the dismally formal and exemplary polite, as if in mortal dread of each other, while I had just had Polly's arm around my neck.

When my entirely proper son had somewhat recovered from the astonishment that the parental bare legs had occasioned, he slipped off his horse, and pulling me aside, said : —

"Look here, Dad, for a man that lays some claim to gout, isn't this rather foolhardy business? I don't want you to die on my hands down here."

"Don't be a fastidious ninny," I said, "but ride over there and bring my shoes across. Meanwhile I'll go and dance in that warm grass, and dry myself. Come on, Bob, how does that gavotte go?"

The charm of such a girl as Polly is that you never have to explain anything, much less excuse anything; and I now recall the picture of Charlie standing by the mounted Io, with one hand on the saddle and the other holding my shoes, as he and his companion looked pensively over to the hot clover, where Polly and I were trying to execute a wild minuet, she whistling like a meadow thrush.

If age has its tender retrospects, why deny to youth and hot blood its tender perspectives, and the privilege of saying to itself, "Oh, for the far-away times when we can be old and gay without bothering, and the skies will be bluer than they ever were before."

THE SWIRL

It was evident enough that Io looked upon the performance with much less concern than did Charlie. She sat her horse with the constant responsibility of being carved to do it. A suspicion stole over me then for the first time that for her to be deeply interested in anything would disturb her beauty.

They both watched us a few moments with indulgent composure, and then Polly told them that they need not wait—we were going on to the Lodge. She even added that we might be back to dinner if nothing happened. They rode away with much dignity, Charlie looking back several times as if there were some doubts in his mind as to who had the best of it.

After that incident Polly and I were on a new footing of intimacy. I suppose that this kind of acquaintanceship has its first kiss, like young love, and then things get along with a tacit understanding. We went to the Lodge, so called on account of the wigwam that had preceded it in colonial history. There we obtained bowls of yellow milk with chunks of apple pie in it, for tiffin, and, sitting on a wooden bench, Polly and I ate our lunch as children do porridge, that is, with the savage zest of hunger, and she said:—

“I know what you are thinking about. You are pitying the man who will have to carry me for keeps.”

“Now you mention it,” I replied, “it will be a task if you always want to get on the other side of things. I fancy the man who undertakes it

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will be like that devotee who is always singing, 'There is one wide river to cross.'"

"Oh, that's the Jordan. It wouldn't be such a bugaboo if there were men like you about to carry folks over. I suppose you think I am a very disagreeable person by this time."

"I haven't quite made up my mind. And yet, I feel quite confident that you are not such a difficult person to carry."

"But I am not so light as you thought me."

"Oh, a mere featherweight to a man of resolution, and then your conversation always relieves your specific gravity."

"Oh, I can be serious and painful and mean like other people. You don't know me. I hope you don't think I would act so recklessly with a young man."

"My dear," I said, "you are over confident. You never can tell from appearances just how young a man is. Some men conceal their youth till they come to a river."

"Don't say that. Somehow I thought that you were a man with whom it wasn't necessary to be careful and laced up, and it was such a luxury to meet a man who was without any perils, — who could eat milk and pie as you do. Wait a moment, and I will get you a napkin."

Dear little midge, she vanished a moment, came back with a towel that she tucked into my shirt front, and then stood off to look at it as if it were a study in still life, and clapped her hands, and said: —

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"You ought to have somebody to keep an eye on you all the time—fancy a man dropping milk on his coat like that, when he is talking earnestly."

"To have an eye on you"—and such an eye—is, I suppose, one of the vain ideals of a mature life. And if the eye isn't literally on you all the time, to feel that it is somewhere in the immediate vicinity, liable to light on you suddenly and straighten out things, must be one of the premonitions of dotage. I wonder if it is.

The world is basely ignorant of the noble virtues of dotage. It mistakes the last development of sensibility for sentimentalism and overgrown selfishness. But the first shoots of the grandfather instinct in a man are quite as beautiful in their way as are the first shoots of maternity in a woman, and altogether less selfish. The next time you get the chance, watch the old man with his first grandchild, and compare his tender solicitude and wholly disinterested self-sacrifice with his earlier parental conduct, when he was presented with a child of his own. I think you will recall his airs of proprietorship and severity of fatherhood as something preposterous and overweening by the side of his later gentleness and love for what is another's.

But to return to our milk and pie.

"Bob," I said, wiping my mouth with the end of the towel, "you are a jolly good girl, and whenever you find a man strong enough to carry you over without complaining, I want to be on

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the bank and dance a gavotte with you before you get your arm round his neck for keeps."

"That's very nice," she exclaimed, "and I'd be pretty sure to get the other arm around your neck. But you mean marriage, and I am the traditional church mouse and must work for my living. Nobody will want to carry me around."

"You speak as if working for your living were a disgrace."

"Yes, I have found that some persons think so. I didn't know it before."

"They must be very narrow and bigoted persons. All labour is worthy in the worthy worker."

"It's awfully good of you to say that. It sounds so fatherly. I'll try and remember it. — There comes Boylston with a team."

"Do you suppose he is coming for us?"

"Sure. Charlie did not know what would happen to you if he left you alone with me too long."

"He is right," I said, as I got up. "I don't know myself."





CHAPTER VI

THE SECESSION OF POLLY

TO be privileged guests in the house of a loved friend is the surest emancipation we can ever enjoy in this life from the innumerable burdens of life itself. Nothing comes so near to shuffling off the mortal coils and cares, without abandoning the senses.

The world of duty is just now praising the nobility of service, and very rightly too. But to some of us, now and then, there come times when the service stops for a while and we are served. These are the spots in our worrying lives where we rest, and say to ourselves with transient delight, "Are they not all ministering spirits?"

The Doctor's spacious establishment, so majestically curtained from the world by Nature herself, seemed to have been put at our disposal. He had drawn the mountains round about him and sat

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down to pleasant dreams. But there were no secrets about it, no privacies, and, best of all, no mysteries, unless we brought them with us. The broad hospitality of the place, like the smiling candour of his handsome old face, had the continual air of open arms, and seemed to be saying, "Do as you please. It will be entirely safe, only don't bother."

I sat in his spacious library one night, shortly after our arrival. The doors were shut and the windows were open. He had stretched himself on a lounge. We could hear the softened voices of youth at the other end of the house singing some of the old war songs, and the notes of the piano tinkled in between. We were farther away from their thoughts than the length of the house.

"So your solitary scion is beginning to worry you," said the Doctor.

"No, no," I said. "I have not lost any sleep. He has amused me by falling into the inevitable nonsense of immaturity. If I did not feel able to pull him out, I should ask you for a sedative."

"Let's come at it directly," said the Doctor. "That's the best way, seeing that you have asked my advice. You are anxious to marry him off with your prudence, instead of letting him marry himself off with his impulses. In other words, you have come to be a damned old match-making dotard, and cannot let things take their course."

"Oh, pardon me, you are heaping too much distinction on me, to say nothing of expletives."

"Distinction? Great Scott, don't flatter your-

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self. I am getting to be the same sort of a dotard myself. It is one of the discouragements of life, that when you give over worrying about marrying yourself, you must begin to worry about getting other people married. You have a nuisance, I speak physiologically, that has to be abated by natural means. So have I. Yours is masculine, or will be in time. Mine is feminine, which, so far as responsibility goes, is a distinction without a difference. Perhaps if we could consolidate the two idiocies, they might have strength enough between them to walk off and relieve us both."

"Are you speaking of Io?" I asked, with genuine surprise.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I have clung tenaciously all my life to the theory that these things regulate themselves much better than we can regulate them. Now, I have arrived at a point of dotage where I must abandon my theory and begin to do a little regulating myself. That girl is part of the estate. My sister there is responsible for her. That is to say, the original responsibility was hers, and she bore it with the usual feminine ignorance of consequences. When this thousand acres fell to her from her husband, she became a little involved, naturally enough for a woman whose kindly disposition was better able to manage aches than acres, and, as you probably know, when I was ready to retire, I pulled her out by buying a half-interest and taking the whole tract on my shoulders. You see, her half-interest will go to the girl, and as neither I nor my sister

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can reasonably expect to keep up this jog trot many more years, and I have put in about twenty-five thousand dollars, I am naturally a little anxious to see the concern fall into hands that will carry out my plans."

"And have you any misgivings as to Miss Io's desire or ability to go on with your work. She appears to be a young woman of much character and promise."

"Now, see here; Io is an estimable blossom, as girls go, but I do not have to tell you that a woman of her make-up isn't built to have her own way, even if by any possibility a way should be prepared for her. Her mission in life is to attract a stronger will than her own, and then submit to it. Ordinarily this would be none of my business, but as she is a residuary legatee, I find I am becoming, on business principles, an infernal old match-maker myself."

"Yes, I see. May I ask if there are any indications that the legatee is thinking of bringing a partner into the concern?"

The Doctor, who had been lying at full length, sat up and, resting his fore arms on his knees, leaned toward me with a new and confidential earnestness, at the same time softening the tones of his voice.

"Io," said he, "is a fine girl, as the phrase goes, but she has no initiative and no resisting power. Some day the executive will, disguised in sentiment, will turn up and inform her what her destiny is, and she will accept it as gospel truth without any guarantee."

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"And you are desirous of preventing it?"

"Preventing it? Heavenly smoke, man, do you suppose that I am such a condign booby as that? I want to bring it on. You never fight a prairie fire with water."

"Ah, no," I said. "You light another fire."

"Well, it has just occurred to me, that as you and I are both threatened in our camps, we might—"

"Light two fires," I said.

"I am not going into the incendiary business directly, but as we both have the inflammable material, I was thinking that if it came together there might be some spontaneous combustion."

I began to laugh. "I see you understand my case better than I suspected," I said.

"Oh, yours is a common case enough," he replied. "But try and understand mine. In the first place, the camps must be consumed at some time, — that's inevitable. It is simply a question of directing the conflagration, and not having any more smoke and ashes than is necessary. I don't say this is pleasant or commendable business for men of our age. But if we haven't any old women about capable of doing it for us, heavenly smoke, man, I suppose we must try our hands at it."

"Are you sure there is anything to do? Judging from appearances, we ought to be delightfully superfluous."

"Pardon me a moment," he said, "if I clear up matters. I haven't told you what I am doing here."

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"My dear Doctor," I said, "it wasn't necessary. You are doing what no other man that I know of ever succeeded in doing. You have kept your ideals of peace and rest till the decline of life, and then let them realize themselves."

"Pickles and persimmon." You talk as if I had got myself into a hermetically sealed casket. I retired on ten thousand a year in secure four per cents. There's nothing very ideal about that. My ten thousand a year disappears here regularly to help other people. But a man cannot guarantee his work after his hand is removed."

I expressed some surprise, and he added, "I am without other kith or kin, as the old phrase goes, than the two women in this house, and, without the least disparagement of either of them, I don't suppose they are any more fit to carry on the work I have been doing here than I am to make faith cures. I have been all my life working for other people, and I'm running this place for other people."

"Does it make you happy?"

"It makes seven families comfortable, and, rightly viewed, that ought to make me happy, I suppose. I'll take you over the place and show you."

"It is truly philanthropic."

"Truly moonshine. There's no philanthropy in making other people work, and supplying the shortage, and doing the scolding. Still, if that boy of yours should by any possibility get warmed up, down here, to a practical view of things, it might be providential."

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"Why providential?"

"Providential because he will have ten thousand a year to pour in when I have got through, and thus prevent some unknown quantity from undoing my work. I suppose you have seen enough to satisfy you that the heiress will not die an old maid."

"Doctor," I said, "you have omitted any mention of the other girl in your establishment."

"Oh, the other girl is an incident. I am talking about the fixtures of the estate. The other girl doesn't count."

At that moment the voices came to us from the parlour, woven into some old trio. We both listened. Something of the characters of the three personages was suggested in the tones. There was a rich accenting contralto heard in a voluptuous undercurrent, some uneven dabs of tenor, a little uncertain, and over all a clear, unfettered soprano, dominating with pitch and volubility, running along, in fact as if challenging the other parts to catch up with it, and ending in a roulade of laughter.

I looked at the Doctor. He was not affected in a similar manner, for he said:—

"You see it was only fair to tell you what had occurred to my mind."

"I think I understand you," I said, "and I see no reason why we should not contemplate the progress of events conjointly. Suppose you tell me about the unknown quantity."

"We have some neighbours," he replied, "who

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are landed proprietors, and others who make flying trips down here in the summer in search of sport; but as they are my guests at various times, I guess I will leave you to use your own eyes and judgment."

At that moment Polly pushed the door open with her foot, and came in, bearing a tray upon which were a bowl of nuts, a bottle of sherry, and wineglasses.

"I suppose," she said, "you were beginning to wonder why I hadn't interrupted you before."

"You?" said the Doctor, who had evidently not finished his confidences. "Put that down on the table, and go and get me a small box of light Havanas that is on my dressing-case."

She tossed her head rather saucily.

"I will send your servant, sahib," she said, turning to make a flying exit.

But he got an arm about her and gave her a little hug, which I thought he might have omitted in my presence.

"Bob can stand smoke like a squaw," he said, "but she resents my orders. Great Cæsar, girl, if I didn't have you to explode against, you unmitigable little snipe, I'd be worse than wet gunpowder. Now go and fetch the small box like a good girl, and you shall crack the nuts for us, and we'll drink your blessed health, which is getting to be a terrible burden to everybody but me,—you incorrigible, stuck-up banshee—remember, the small box."

She gave me one glance as she disappeared.

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It was singularly legible, and it said: "You see how the Mogul all went out of him at the slightest resistance. Talk about wet gunpowder."

The Doctor relapsed at once into the theme which Polly had disturbed without dislodging.

"Old man," he said, — and "old man" was his favourite term of confidence, — "old man, neither you nor I at our age can go into the match-making business, but it seems to me the depth of hoary imbecility for one man to be going about with an interrogation in his keeping, and the other man guarding the answer to it, and both of them looking askance at each other."

Our heads had come pretty close together, and our voices had sunk to undertones. When Polly came in with the box of cigars, I think we both straightened up a little as if caught unawares.

"Gracious," she said, "I ought to have knocked."

"What are they doing out there in the parlour?" asked the Doctor.

She looked sidewise out the door, as if it were necessary to ascertain.

"They are together, turning over a pile of old music."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "it's pretty old stuff, I suppose."

"I guess so," said Polly; "but it answers its purpose just as well as new."

"Very well, don't disturb them," said the Doctor, prying open the cigar box with a paper-

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knife. "You serve our wine. What did you bring that pony glass for?"

"You said you were going to drink my health, and I supposed I would have to be in it modestly."

"So you shall," coming down at once to a familiar courtliness. "Here's to your dauntless vitality. As it couldn't be worse, may it never be less. You were born to defy all doctors in general, and one Doctor in particular."

Whereupon he drank off his sherry with a fine old-fashioned smack, and the minx at the table, looking through her tiny glass with one eye, said:—

"I seem to be drinking to my own misfortunes, but I go you." Whereupon she sipped the wine and made a face.

"Now sit down and suppress yourself," said the Doctor, "and we'll let you into the private council. I have just been telling my old friend here that there are no secrets in this house. Do you understand? He is a privileged guest. He is to have whatever he takes a fancy to. If he wants the key of the wine-cellar, it must be taken up to his room. If he should take a notion to marry the young lady of the house, not a word must be said."

"Not even by the young lady herself?" asked Polly, with genuine surprise.

"Well, you see, she isn't as anxious to say things as you are, my dear," continued the Doctor. "My friend here is a good deal like myself; he

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takes great pride in his dignity and decorum as a father, and insists on all the small proprieties —”

“Oh, come now,” I interrupted, seeing that the young lady was making some ironical comments on this speech with her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth, “you are putting me in a false light; yes, you are — Bob and I understood each other at the first jump. Confound the small proprieties where everything is on so large a scale.”

“Tush, tush, old man. I never could keep more than one eye on Bob, but now that you are here, she ought to see that there are two on her. When you understand him better, my dear,” he said, turning to Polly, “you will see that he doesn’t do things rashly like young men.”

“You mean,” said Polly, “that he doesn’t wade in at the first invitation.”

I laughed boisterously, but the Doctor regarded her seriously.

“‘Wade in,’ my child?” he said. “If there is anything that my friend dislikes, it is slang, and especially New York slang.”

“Doctor,” I said, making one of those plunges that divert, if they do not relieve, one’s conscience, “did Polly come from New York?”

“Where she came from,” he replied, “does not appear to me at this moment to be so exigent as the where she is driving at, if you will pardon that form of speech.”

“Let me ask you one other question; did you show her that letter I wrote you?”

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The Doctor took his cigar from his mouth and looked at me in undisguised astonishment.

But Polly got ahead of him. "The Doctor," she said, "is not in the habit of showing his private letters, and what is more to the point, nobody in the house would read one if he left it open on the table."

That this was jumping behind my question to the real import of it, my cheek must have betrayed to her. But I admired her sudden assumption of dignity even more than I had admired her badinage.

"My dear girl," I said, "you told me that you could be mean if you tried. It wasn't necessary to prove it by thinking me capable of such a suspicion."

I thought this embodied enough of compliment and apology to turn away the wrath of the baggage, but, when I looked at her, she had her head up, her under lip was drawn in, and there was a scintillant drop in the corner of her eye, as I live.

The Doctor was lying back, rolling out a perfectly disinterested column of smoke.

"Gentlemen," said Polly, "I wish you good night."

And out she marched like a vivandière.

"You are not as old as I am," said the Doctor, contemplating the ceiling.

"No," I said, "I appear to be young enough to have made what we call in New York a bad break. I must have offended her. Wait a moment. I'll ask her pardon and bring her back."

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Whereupon I started in pursuit of her. But I could not catch her. I ran up the stairs, saw a flash of white skirt as a door was opened and shut quickly, and fancied I heard the click of a key.

"It is very ridiculous," I said to myself, as I came slowly back, "to be jumping about in this juvenile fashion after that petticoat. Confound her elusive airs, what am I thinking about?" When I had reseated myself, the Doctor, still contemplating the ceiling, said:—

"Let me see, how old *are* you, anyway?"

"I suppose I did act like a boy."

"More like a trout when he sees a glittering fly," observed the Doctor. "I should suppose that you had learned by this time that nothing hurts a young woman so much as to discover that she is not the one who is going to be married off."

"Then she must have known what we were talking about."

"My dear fellow, if there is anything in this house that Bob doesn't know all about, you can make up your mind it isn't worth knowing."

Then he dismissed the subject peremptorily.

Several days passed in this uneventful manner, the Doctor carrying me into all the byways of his domain, and pointing out with admirable patience the multitudinous details of the estate, which I saw with much the same pleasure that one experiences in looking at a vast piece of machinery that does its prodigious work noiselessly. How smooth and systematic and unobtrusively the great farm and the great park came together without the observer

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being able to tell where one melted into the other, making of thrift and luxury a rare marriage of content! As for the Doctor, he was like the master of the machine, who stands by to keep his eye on the gearing and bearings, only adding a drop of oil here and there, and all the hard work is done easily and continuously under the steady gaze of intelligence.

In the afternoons — what drowsy, fragrant afternoons they were — I was left to my siesta, or allowed to read in the Doctor's well-stocked library, where the sun came in broken and dancing lights through the rose vines, and sometimes I could hear, over the drone of the bees, the murmur of voices on the rose bench, and knew that Charlie and Io were weaving their own spell, so I was content.

Into the slumbrous restfulness of the place came Io's admirers, with pleasant disturbance. I could see them from the window, ride up and make their courtly obeisance on the big veranda, gallant fellows enough, in corduroy breeches and gay sporting coats, with large exuberant carelessness, mingling formal politeness with freedom of demeanour, and acting altogether like city men who have left metropolitan restraints behind. It was plain that they were tolerated by the Doctor's generous hospitality, and that they made the most of it, without penetrating very deep into his domesticity or drawing him familiarly into their group. They regarded our ménage with good-natured familiarity, but it was evident enough that there was only one real object

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of interest in the place. One of these summer neighbours had been introduced to me as Mr. Berwick Fancher, and his personality outranked the others in quantity rather than in quality. There was so much more of him. He knew my sister, Mrs. Dewey, very well; was glad to meet a city man so far away from his base; how did I fill in the time; if it grew heavy, hoped I would come up to the club house; there were some extra flies and rods there, and a rack of good fowling-pieces; and then he stalked off as if he had exhausted the polite repertoire. It required a constant exercise of one's self-conscious dignity to withstand this magnificent impact of health and egotism. Mr. Fancher's heartiness was entirely dynamic, and was probably not intended to be supercilious, but overweening physical health sometimes manages to be both. His broad shoulders, square face, massive jaw, heavy, jet-black whiskers, and handsome, sparkling brown eye, made an ensemble of virility that overrode everything. I think sensibility invariably shrank a little at his personal momentum, for there was an irresistible puissance in his vibrant bass voice and his sinewy step. That it was I who attracted him to our otherwise unattractive group, he took no pains to conceal.

This young man's father had more than once flitted across my view at the Club. I remembered that Major Downs held him in great estimation, as in fact did a very large circle of men, for no other apparent reason than that he was able to buy them all up. As to how the elder Fancher made

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his money, proper form never permitted us to inquire. If that matter was discussed at all, it was discussed among the dowagers whose social bait the son had refused to nibble. It was very certain that the son had fallen into the worst of all human habits, which is the habit of obtaining all that one desires. Perhaps my passing interest in him sprang from a parental pride in my own offspring, and I will not deny that I had a little anxiety, if not resentment, at the self-complacent manner in which obstreperous health planted both its feet into a demesne that the Doctor and I had staked out between us.

I was walking on the big porch one morning just after breakfast, wondering what had become of Polly, and expecting every moment that she would flutter out of the hall lightly, and, catching me by the arm, again add buoyancy and intimacy to my exercise, when Mr. Fancher arrived, quite spectacularly, on a splendid black animal, accompanied by a mounted groom who led an extra horse. He came up to the porch in fine style. He had changed his jaunty white corduroy jacket for a Prince Albert coat and wore a silk hat. His salutation to me was not lacking in politeness, but I thought it was tinged with a slight air of supererogation. "Miss Io," he said, "promised to try this Morgan horse. We are going to take a five-mile dash. A capital morning for a run, eh?"

Then he ignored me entirely in the inspection of the animal, so that I continued my walk with

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a half-conscious duty to let him see that his arrangements were of no especial interest to me. But I could not help wondering if lo — lo with those drooping lids — would not accept this man's coercive masculinity as irresistible. I had seen such women before. Their weight of loveliness destroyed their resistance. I slipped away to the library, and watched her come out in a riding habit and wait for Boylston to bring her side-saddle. She was animated and flushed, and I remarked that Mr. Fancher was not restrained by any idolatrous delicacy. As the little cavalcade rode away, Charlie came up just in time to see them issue at the gate into the highway. If he had a spark of his father's enthusiasm, he must have admired the beauty with such a mount, as she galloped out of sight. He leaned against one of the pillars of the veranda, gazing after her, and if you will pardon that kind of dotage which in a parent is not the result of age, I must acknowledge that he for the moment appeared somewhat inadequate to the situation. How, I asked myself, was that slender and sensitive youth, who had never been allowed to put one foot beyond the limits of a delicate *noblesse oblige*, to grapple with this lusty Lochinvar who would ride up and carry off the maiden under his eyes by sheer strength and audacity. It seemed to me at that moment that Charlie looked smaller than usual as he stood there, limply enough, up against the possibilities.

Perhaps every fond father does not go through this experience, but how many mothers do; and

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had I not for years been playing the dual rôle in watching over and possibly exaggerating him? But I lacked a woman's power of magnifying her own.

I would have given a great deal if I could have told by Charlie's pensive attitude if he was thinking of the beauty who had galloped away, or of that girl in New York. There was a keen little reproach in the reflection that I might have set a trap for him only to see him uselessly caught and mangled. If he had already been smitten by this beauty, — and Heaven knows no man could blame him for that, — how was I to assist him? I had always come to his rescue promptly. Must I stand by, now and pity him? The Doctor was averse to intrigues, at least he pretended that in such matters it was safe to let the best man win. There was nobody in the establishment that a doting father could confide in.

Bless my soul, yes, there was, — there was Polly. What quick work her nimble wit would make of that overbearing masculinity. What finesse, what intuition, what quick discernment, and Polly had almost precipitated herself at me. What aid and comfort that little diplomatist might be to a — well, to a doting person.

I got up and strode out again upon the porch.

"Halloo, my boy," I cried, "what's the matter?"

"Matter," he said, "with me?"

"Yes, you look lonesome."

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"More than usual?" he asked.

"What's become of Miss Polly?"

"Miss Polly,—why, I understand that she's gone."

"Gone?" I almost gasped. "Gone where?"

He turned away, but I got in front of him.

"How do you know she has gone?" I asked.

"I heard it mentioned. I supposed you knew it."

"What did she go for?"

"Perhaps there wasn't any adequate reason for her staying."

There was something like evasion in his manner and answers, and I did not like it.

"Look here, Comrade," I said, "if you have done anything or said anything to drive that girl away, hang me if I don't hunt her up and make an apology."

This conversation was broken into by the appearance of "Mother," who came out smilingly, with her two fingers on her mouth. I came at her directly. "Madame," I said, "what has become of Polly?"

The dear old lady had her eyes on the highway, and I could see that her mind was there also. Polly was of little account to her at that moment.

"Miss Polly," she said, "has gone to her cousin's over at the Lodge. We never can tell just what that young lady will do next."

"Delightful," I said, "she is liable to come back at any moment."

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"Well, I don't know — She sent for her trunk last night, and the Doctor refused to let it go. It wasn't very nice of her to go off in that manner when she knew I had company. She's as independent as if she was hired."

It did not become me to take advantage of this kind old lady's garrulity to gratify my curiosity, but I could not help venturing to remark that I hoped the Doctor would hold fast to her trunk, for it would be a pity to lose sight entirely of such a sprightly young woman.

"Yes, she is sprightly enough," said the Mother. "There's nothing the matter with her sprightliness, I'm sure — she keeps us all on the twitter; but girls will be girls, you know, or they wouldn't have a chance to kiss and make up."

I was not disposed to agree with her final decision. Some girls, I was inclined to think, must be witches, but as we were obviously not thinking of the same girl, I moved my chair around so that I could see the beauty and her cavalier re-enter the gate on their return, merely remarking that the young ladies were so much attached to each other that I should think Miss Io would miss Polly.

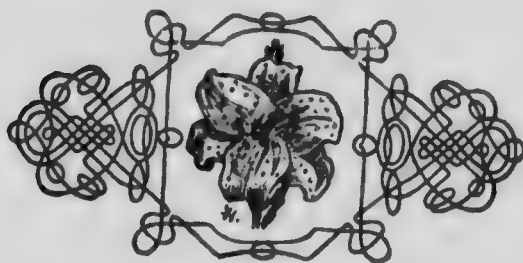
"Yes, I guess she knows that we miss her. The Doctor said this morning that a breakfast without Polly was like trying to shave with cold water."

While we sat there our equestrians returned. They came in at the gate with much more pagantry than they were aware of, and the old lady

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fairly beamed with admiration. As soon as Io was dismounted, her cavalier, with a sweep of his hat, put spurs to his horse and he and his groom went thundering off. It was like a page of Froissart. The first thing that Miss Io said as she mounted the steps was, "Has Polly come back?"

It thus became evident to me that the whole household wanted Polly back again, and I made up my mind that I would find Charlie, who had wandered off somewhere, and then see if we could find the house called the Lodge, and, if possible, bring her back. In my search for Charlie, I ran upon the Doctor in the trees, and told him frankly what I intended to do. To my surprise he said: "Very good. I will go with you. I want to give her a piece of my mind. If you feel like it, we will walk there. It is only a couple of miles."





CHAPTER VII

THE CAPITULATION OF POLLY

THE Doctor and I strode along across his fields in the full glare of that summer day, heralded by innumerable birds and bannered by blossoming trees. The aspect of the country was one of whelming life and beauty, softened by infinite varieties of colour, and prophetic of an orderly opulence that seemed to be the expression of an undisturbed divine plan. It was impossible not to feel the gentle stress of Nature, everywhere luxuriating in the early stages of its exultation. The lanes were snowed deep in blossoms, the air was heavy with the incense of a thousand censers. It was that auspicious moment when, as the poet has said, "the earth is in tune," and out of her myriad mysteries came only the harmonies that intoxicate the sense.

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The Doctor, who instinctively knew what I was thinking about, fitted himself into it with a ready gusto.

"The real charm of this country," he said, "has not changed much for half a century. The sturdy men who came here from Scotland and the north of Ireland left most of the distressing influences behind them. They came from bleak hills and storm-swept moors into a land flowing with milk and honey, where the roses sprang up over night and the grasses of the field stretched forward millions of hands to meet them. The whole belt of this country, from the mountains eastward across the great terraces to the sea, slopes away in an intermediate zone of quiet luxuriance. On one side races the torrent of Northern enterprise, magnificent, clamorous, insatiable; on the other side stretches the exhausted domains of an outlived condition, waiting for new life. This is the splendid mean between the aggressive destructiveness and the patriarchal indolence of man. Here he seems to have lost everything but the primitive thrift and content, and walks in the footsteps of his fathers with a homely industry."

Having delivered himself of this characteristic speech, the Doctor stopped in the lane and pointed—very much as Abraham might have done—to the outlying meadows, through which a bit of blue ribbon ran its watery way, and upon which the dainty mistress of the season had shirred her wild parterres with feminine device. It was

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not that, however, to which he directed my attention, but to the Southdown mutton moving lazily across the slopes, and looking at that distance like the aphides on a succulent leaf. Silhouetted on the crown of the rise, against the purple bastions of a far-off mountain, sat the shepherd and his collies, like black dots on the rim of it all. The pastoral perspective was like an opening into ancient days. The soft south wind swept over the stretches, rippling the fields and puffing lazily a few white clouds that sailed into the northeast. No doubt the Doctor saw that my fancy was leaping ahead of the facts, and for that profligacy he always had a leash of practical sense, though he was not always able to adjust it to my evasive faculties. I believe his remarks made, on this occasion, reference to pounds of fleece and heads of fatlings, with a quiet observation about the easy flux of vegetable into animal life, if you did not interfere violently with it. But when he drew me down to the stark market rates, and told me that he would cut a hundred and fifty tons of hay, worth two thousand dollars in the market, and began to figure on the small profits, I, who must have been breathing in a little of the illimitable, and thinking of a shepherdess in her buckled shoes dancing over those slopes, rather resented his sordid disturbance of my atmosphere, and told him that the result by barn measurement did not appear to my financial mind to be exultingly remunerative.

"That is because you look at it through your

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infernal Wall Street spectacles," he said. "Look at it through my unaided eyes just for a moment. I haven't taken to glasses yet."

"Seen through your eyes," I asked, "is the sum total changed?"

"Absolutely. Metamorphosed — sublimated from mere connivance to comfort; from insatiate grasping and grubbing to a kind of ethereal guardianship. You do not apprehend the spiritual side of it."

"Spiritual side of what, — wool and mutton and grass?"

"Not exactly. The spiritual side of my dealing in them at all, without any barn measurements. The spirituality of it resides in the fact that I get so precious little out of it."

"That's it," I said; "the spiritual assets of your husbandry are not computable. If I were to give way to your agriculture of the air, I might try to reap some of your rhapsodies, but I should probably fail for want of your harvesting fancy."

"Then you think that I reap nothing but fancies?"

"Oh, yes, — philosophy. But you would reap that in the top of a New York apartment house. I shall agree with you and share your enjoyment so long as you do not try to list your assets as available resources."

"Yes," he said reflectively, "my scheme must appear that way to you, and is not an industrial one."

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"Better," I said. "As you put it, it seems to me to be a religious scheme."

He laughed heartily. "Try and understand me," he said. "I have been beguiled into it, not by a promoter, but by the cajolement of the thing itself. So great has been its influence that I have given up working for myself and taken to working for other people. You have no idea what a relief it is. Instead of pulling the other fellows down in a strictly business or industrial manner, I stoop a little so that the other fellows can climb up a little higher on my shoulders. I am carrying seven families on my back."

"But you do not stoop any."

"No. I stand pretty straight to it, do I not? I learned, when I was in England, that the whole art of being a successful landed proprietor is not to depend on your land, but to make it depend on you. Nothing is more un-American and effete and delightful. It is a lesson that I learned from the land itself, and I think any one can learn it when he isn't content to furrow the land, but fraternizes with it."

"That," I said, "is undoubtedly a pretty poetic idea, and is properly appreciated when a man has ten thousand a year."

The Doctor gave no heed to this, but continued: "I came into this country with the common understanding that I was to get everything I could out of it. Squeeze and grub was the agricultural motto. If I hadn't left most of my human kind out of the scheme and taken a

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lesson or two from Nature herself, I should have been much more successful as an agriculturist, but not as self-respecting as a philosopher or a religionist. No sooner had I settled myself and arranged my sordid machinery than I established an intimacy with Nature and began to feel a little ashamed of myself. She had to squeeze and grub. Everything was giving up to something else; from the stem of grass to the Holstein cows the whole procession of forces was bent on relinquishing, giving up joyously all that it had, and then getting out of the way for something else. I pictured myself bringing the procession to a halt on my porch, spreading myself and taking it all in, and congratulating myself that I was a terminal depot where it all stopped. I think that I sneaked around among the fields for a while, feeling that I was a piece of impertinence, and before I knew it I had fallen into the general scheme. There was no use in breaking a cog in such enginery. So I took to passing on the benefits. I might have discharged my seven workmen and lived on my interest, but I retained them and let them live on it. When a man gets to be my age, I suppose it does look like religion, but it is only a doting voluptuousness. I like to fancy myself sitting over these people and shepherding them with a benign superiority like that fellow you saw on the rim with his dogs. Now and then one of the flock gets a little astray, like this lamb we are going after, and then I come down with my crook and fetch things round into

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natural order again. It's about the only luxury left to a dotard."

"Doctor," I said, "you are perfectly right, and I think I understand you. Having imbibed the great lesson from Nature, you set about transforming your human establishment into a *par-terre* where everybody should bloom and sing and grow, and take no special heed. I suppose it is as near to a paradisiacal condition as a philosopher ever gets in this world, and it was worth coming a long way to see. If you will pardon me for saying it, I feel like a bird myself on this occasion; but what I cannot understand is why any lamb in the flock should be at all anxious to get away."

"Bob — ah, you are thinking of Bob. Well, you see that Bob belongs so entirely to the nature of things, that her absence makes me feel that I have in some way disturbed the natural order — just as if the robins should depart in July."

"I hope there was nothing in my treatment of her," I said, "that made her uncomfortable."

"That's just it," said the Doctor, catching hold of my arm. "Bob probably scented our conspiracy, and being such a child of Nature, her first impulse was to escape from anything so diabolically unnatural — you understand me, I mean that she scented the conspiracy and resented the omission. It is a peculiarity of Bob's, that she must not only suspect everything, but must have a finger in everything. I think you will have to tell her all about your paternal anxiety, and ask

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her to help you. I have great faith in Bob's caprices and inscrutable impulses."

"I wish you would suggest some possible way in which her delightful caprices would be of any assistance to a slightly perturbed father."

"One can never tell. She might keep Mr. Fancher at a distance. I have already observed that he avoids her as he would an X-ray. Has it occurred to you that Mr. Fancher needs a gentle repulsion, such as the duties of hospitality forbid me to exercise?"

"From the somewhat casual observation that I made of Mr. Fancher, I think that gentleness would play a part of no more importance with him than does water on a duck's back. I hope I am not disparaging your guest."

"Ah, you have been observing him."

"I passed the time of day with him, and he managed to impart to that amenity a decided disregard of delicacy."

The Doctor laughed. "Bob," he said, "is a most extraordinary buffer. If I thought there was any danger of my colliding with Mr. Fancher, I'd hang Bob over my gunwale."

"I wish you would tell me explicitly in what way I can avail myself of Polly's talents."

"I don't know that I can tell you why a pinch of salt adds to the zest of one's appetite. I have an idea that Polly belongs more entirely to the natural order than we do, and as the consequences which we are trying to avoid belong also to that order, we might baffle Nature herself with an alliance

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with Nature. Bob probably sees through us both, and is piqued that she has been left out of the conspiracy. Besides, with the mingled impudence and acumen of her sex, she detests Fancher."

"Why do you think so?" I asked, feeling a sudden throb of kindness toward Bob.

"Don't ask me why I think. Great Scott, man, when one is up to his ears in a day like this, he doesn't try to find out why he thinks. He just keeps on thinking, very much as he keeps on breathing."

And the Doctor threw out his ample breast and took in an extra supply of oxygen.

"Doctor," I said, "what do you suppose Miss Io's views are with respect to Mr. Fancher?"

"Absolutely nebulous and abeyant," he replied, "waiting like chaos to be shaped by some imperative will. Io is the most plastic arrangement of beauty and inertia you ever saw. So imagine my anxiety and, to some extent, my responsibility."

Here we came within sight of the house where our renegade had taken refuge, and I exclaimed:—

"Why, I've been here before; eaten pie and milk here."

"So much the better," said the Doctor. "We'll just clap her straw hat on, take her by the ear, and march her back. When you get a good opportunity take her into your confidence discreetly."

On arriving at the gate we were confronted by two malicious mastiffs that had the run of the

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yard, and that warned us off with a superfluous show of white teeth and a duet of growls.

The Doctor expressed some indignant astonishment that the dogs were not chained up, and then shouted "House" in summoning tones. Immediately there appeared at an upper window the pert face of Polly herself, holding the curtain away with a quick hand and leaning eagerly out.

"Come down here, you baggage," cried the Doctor, "and shut up these dogs."

"Gracious, how you frightened me," said Polly. "I thought you were tramps. Did you bring my trunk? How kind —"

"No nonsense. I've come to fetch you back. Put your hat on."

Polly leaned her elbows on the window-sill. "There comes Boylston," she said, "how good of him. He's bringing the trunk."

We looked round and presently up drove the family phaeton, with "Mother" and Boylston in it. The old lady leaned out and, seeing us at the gate, said in an explanatory way: —

"I'll take her back with me."

"How good of you all," said Polly. "But you know I can't come down. I am just as much afraid of the dogs as you are, and if I came down they would be sure to tear the only innocent person there is to pieces. Marjory has gone to the field, and she always lets them loose till she comes back."

The doctor leaned on the gate-post and shouted to the dogs to be quiet, and "Mother" tried to

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coax them with much sibilation from the vehicle, while Boylston, who was assuring the horse that there was no burglary intended despite the noise, also tried to whistle amicably between. I looked at the scene and especially at the bright face so leisurely taking it all in at the window, and said to the Doctor:—

"It seems to me that this is one of those occasions when it would disturb the natural order to interfere. There is somebody else coming up the road," and sure enough, presently Miss Io and my disinterested son appeared on horseback and joined the group, thereby increasing the clamour of the dogs, that were evidently not used to such convocations. Charlie regarded the family gathering with considerable awe, I thought, but Polly clapped her hands.

"What a surprise party," she cried. "Stand still a moment. I have it."

Then she disappeared from the window.

"It's all right," said the Doctor. "She has gone to get her hat. We ought to have brought a shotgun and a pair of handcuffs."

Boylston, who had tied his horse, approached the fence coaxingly, and Polly, calling to him from the window, asked him to stand a little more on one side.

"Come, come," cried the Doctor, "never mind your frills. We can't stand here all day."

"Just a moment," said Polly. "Keep your eye on that chimney. All right now—there you are," and we all heard the click, and knew that

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the captive maiden had snapped us with her camera.

"It was such a splendid opportunity," she said afterward, "to catch the whole family at bay, with HIM in the foreground, gnashing his teeth, and everybody staring into the sky, as if a new star had appeared."

But it was reserved for Charlie to put the finishing touch of absurdity on this picture. He came up to the fence, saying quite demurely: "I suppose you all want to go in. I don't think these dogs are dangerous," and, putting his hand over the rail, he patted them on their heads, and with a word or two transformed them into tail-wagging lambs. "I'll just chain them up," he said, opening the gate and striding off round the house with the two animals at his heels.

"Now, then," cried the Doctor, "you stand here at the gate, and Boylston, you guard the rear exit, while I take the position by storm."

"You had better let me go in," said Mother, "and help her arrange herself."

"Nonsense," said the Doctor. "I will arrange her in short order," and in he strode.

"It seems to me," said Io, "that Mr. Charles is better than any of you in arranging matters."

"Oh, when it comes to dogs," I said, "he always did show the stuff he was made of. It's what the Doctor calls fraternization."

Our colloquy was interrupted by the appearance of the Doctor leading the captive on his arm. She looked very demure, but stepped rather airily

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for a prisoner, and preserved, I thought, some kind of latent defiance in the tilt of that chip hat.

"Please," she said, making a great show of struggling with the Doctor's arm, "please — I see one friend in the crowd — let me go to him," and she kissed her hand to me.

"You just get in to that phaeton and do as I tell you, you absconding and ineffable little ingrate," said the Doctor.

Once in the phaeton, guarded by the old lady beside her, the Doctor arranged the bodyguard. He and I walked Indian file on one side, Charlie and Boylston on the other, I bringing up the rear with the two horses, and thus protected, the cortege moved in solemn procession down the road, its majesty broken only at times by little flute-like bursts from the phaeton.

When the captive was once more landed in triumph on the Doctor's front veranda, I think there were many upbraidings and explanations and evasions all tangled up in soprano, from which the masculine conspirators kept well away. But an hour or two later, when matters had apparently fallen into their old rut and everybody seemed to have recovered his and her former buoyancy, except Charlie, who was moping somewhere round the carriage house, trying to make up for the loss of New York excitement by the vivacity of Boylston and the animation of the horses, then it was I caught Bob on the fly and pinned her down on the rose bench. She appeared to be

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a little more nervous than usual, I thought, and showed an inclination to escape me.

"Polly," I said, "the first time that we had a talk, you invited me to be confidential with you. I have just come to the conclusion that I should have taken you at your word."

That did not allay her nervousness. "Oh, don't bother with it," she said. "I was too rude."

"Not a bit. I was too reserved. The Doctor thinks I ought to tell you everything."

"HE? Everything? Me?"

"Yes; what makes you so apprehensive? I am old enough to be your father, and you are young enough to be my daughter. You might even, as a matter of friendship, regard Charlie as your brother."

"Father," she repeated rather softly, looking up at me, and pulling in her under lip as was her habit. "It sounds a little too sacred for a pretence."

"You suspected that I had run away from something when I came down here. You were right. Now let me tell you just what it was."

"Oh," said she, quite impulsively, "why not write it? It would be ever so much nicer in a letter — and then I can study it."

"No. I am going to tell you all about it now. You see, Charlie and I are a little different from most persons. We have always been close together, and think a great deal more of each other than father and son usually do. I suppose his

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future and happiness are really more important to me than anything else in life; you can understand that."

"Yes," she said, "in a father that sounds all right."

"Oh, Charlie feels the same way. I don't believe he would deliberately do anything against my wishes; but Charlie is young, you know, and might do something before he knew it."

"Did he?"

"Why, yes. There wasn't anything wrong, you understand. It was only foolish. Young men cannot always see as far ahead as their fathers. Try and imagine yourself his sister, and then I am sure you will take my view of it. Remember that I had been for so many years planning and preparing and watching and guarding, and then you will see how it affected me."

"What did?"

"Why, his,—how shall I put it?—his getting estranged from me a little,—just a little, you know. Being deluded, beguiled,—only through his eyes, you know. He allowed himself to get acquainted with a girl in the theatre. I don't believe he stopped to think, or he wouldn't have done it. Boys are so easily caught by a passing illusion, and, poor fellows, they have no means of knowing just how unworthy it may be. Probably he thought she was an angel, and all that sort of thing, just because of her glitter and shallow prettiness."

"Was she pretty?"

"I suppose she was. But all girls are more or

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less pretty to young men. She was probably nothing more than the ordinary creature of plumage and vanity, the kind that one expects to find in a theatre. Now if it were your brother and I were telling you this about him, you would feel just as I do, wouldn't you? But Charlie is made of such excellent stuff that I knew if I could only get him away where some other and better ideal could fill his eye, don't you know, he would rise to the situation. There's nothing so effectual for this kind of disease as change of air and scene, and when my old friend the Doctor invited us down here, fortune favoured me by presenting such new attractions as I feel sure would create in any young man's mind a new standard of beauty and character. Remember that the Doctor and I are old and intimate friends, and when he told me that he was anxious to save Io from the same mistakes of youth that beset my boy, — and, if you will permit me to say so, my dear girl, that beset all young persons, — you can imagine how providential it all seemed. Can't you turn round and let me see your face when I am trying my best to be confidential? Just think what a disaster it would have been if Charlie in a moment of heedlessness had made an alliance with some dreadful woman in a theatre; and young men are all liable to do these insane things. I have been young myself, Polly."

"Have you, really?" said Polly, in a tone of doubt.

"Sure. Don't you feel the least bit of sym-

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pathy for me in my experience. I had an idea that you could help me."

"O dear me," said Polly, "I don't see what you brought me back here for. What can I do?"

"You are so quick and clever, and then you are closer to Io than anybody else can be at present; and it is all such a plain-sailing duty for every one of us. You seem to have lost all your desire to be confidential. What is it I have done to forfeit your candour?"

She was silent a moment, as if trying to think. Then she said rather hesitatingly:—

"Was the New York person—Mr. Charles's sweetheart, wasn't that what you called her?"

"No, I didn't call her that."

"Was she irredeemably unworthy?"

"I didn't say that either. She wasn't in Charlie's class, that is all, and he will forget her—he must."

"For Io's sake."

"Let us say for his own sake and his father's."

"And I am to help in it. You ought to see that it is impossible."

"I cannot see why," I said, taking her little hand coaxingly, and remembering how it had gone up round my neck there at the river. "I wish you would tell me why you cannot."

She gave something like a little gulp. I felt it come down to her fingers. But she did not turn round.

"Because—" she said, and then she took a fresh breath—"because I am the disreputable New York girl herself."



CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH I STRUGGLE WITH MY OWN WEB

I WISH I could describe with exactness how this large clap of thunder from a small pink cloud affected me. I suppose the best way to express it would be to avoid the idea of thunder and stick to that of lightning, for I was not so much stunned as illuminated. A great deal of what ought to have been perplexity disappeared in a flash. Presto, the whole business cleared up at a stroke, as if all of the facts had been set in order on a dark stage, and only awaited this electric flash. Whatever may have been my immediate surprise, I had no opportunity to express it to my companion, for she pulled her hand away from mine suddenly, and disappeared, leaving only a few flurries of rose leaves.

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I sat there a few moments and made an inventory of the details that came into view. Her prescience, her intuition, when I first met her — they looked rather shabby now. Her protean vivacity and frankness — of course, if she was an actress, they were her stock in trade. Her coquetry with me and all that silly business in the river — part of the comedy of cajolment. What craft in telling me that she had to earn her living and bedevilling me into praise of it. Her roguish ingenuousness in throwing the roses into Charlie's face — that was nothing more, after all, than the familiarity of two comedians.

I did not at the moment ask myself how the girl of the theatre came to be down there, lying in wait for me, though that was a question that, more than any other, needed explanation. What just then appeared to me to be of more immediate concern than anything else was my sudden flowering out as the dupe of the whole group, every one of whom appeared to have entered into an easy understanding to fool me to the top of my bent. Perhaps in any other mood I should have regarded the disclosure as something in the nature of a practical joke, of which I was the victim, to be put by without annoyance. But as I had set out with what I considered superior craft to bring things about to my own satisfaction, I could not very well at the first view help feeling that my own doting imbecility was the largest element on exhibition, and some degree of pride and pique must be allowed to a man of my years who

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does not like to be outwitted even by his affections.

I think I sat there some time feeling that nothing but sheer slang would accurately express my condition, and calling myself, confidentially, "a purblind chump." But this easy labelling of my discomfiture did not disentangle anything. It did not seem possible that the Doctor had lent himself to the cheap trick of befooling me, and yet how was it possible for him not to know what was going on in his own establishment. How in thunder, I asked myself, did my unsophisticated son manage the wires so adroitly. There was no answer to this conundrum to be pumped out of my consciousness. But I must say that my momentary irritation and resentment were accompanied by a very distinct sense of loss that, to tell the truth, was more poignant than anything else. It was not alone that my Comrade had suddenly withdrawn from the atmosphere of affectionate frankness that I had created for him, and gone without hesitation into the common arena of deception; but a sprite, a real, live, and lovable piece of ingenuous girlhood, that I had warmed to with all the ardent susceptibility of years, had shaken her skirts and resolved herself into a common actress, intent only on making me a victim of her intrigue. Such a discovery always congeals a man's best judgment, turning even his limpid magnanimity into sharp crystals.

It was growing late in the afternoon. I sat there on the rose bench feeling a new sense of

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

loneliness stealing over me. After all, what folly it was to try and keep alive and fresh the zestful companionships which one has outgrown. The things that one cherishes most must go on their way. It is the penalty of age to be deserted. What was it the Doctor had so recently preached to me about turning the penalty into a privilege and giving up. Must a man then tear out of his heart all that keeps him alive, and say to it cheerfully, Go your way — my share in it all is relinquished? What a supreme and protective philosophy such a man as Major Downs possessed. Those practical old fellows kept their systems free from these undergrowths, and escaped from the dotage of the sensibilities into the sufficient routine of dinners, and cards, and good wholesome tittle-tattle, enjoying the procession calmly from the safe Club window.

I looked at the roses, hanging all round me with odorous opulence. They wore a new aspect of evanescence, and every light breath of air bade them fall to pieces and litter the ground with outworn beauty. The bees far up the wall of the house kept up a dull moan. It was like the movement of some irresistible, ongoing stream. A few swallows flickered across the sky, to and fro, with vagrant uncertainty. The big shadow of the house reached eastward. I could see its peak crawling across the highway, as if to emphasize the passing of the afternoon, or perhaps, with the merciless symbolism of all visible things, only

I STRUGGLE WITH MY OWN WEB

to picture for me what might be crawling over my own heart.

Bah! you will say. For a man of your age, this is the very effervescence of decline. Up, man, and about your duty, if you have any. It is not the rôle of maturity to sit in rose bowers and moon.

If you are saying this, it is a coincidence, for it is just what I was saying myself, as I got up and struck the rose vine with my cane, a little vindictively, only to bring down a shower of petals as if I deserved to be snowed under, pinkly.

But you are to have a little patience with maturity, seeing that you are young and heedless. It is only a man's weaknesses, after all, that entitle him to your attention. Dear me, if we were all strong like you, where would be our tangle and our romance?

I walked off vigorously, because muscular exercise, without our knowing it, is a faucet when the enclosed feelings are too heady. But my vigorous step did not prevent me from keeping on the other side of the junipers, so that my condition should not be observed from the house. Thus it was that I coupled vigour of limb with a sneaking desire to be alone with my discomfiture.

Perhaps the circulation of the blood helped to clear the emotional sky and stir up my volition, for I said, "Ho, ho, I am only so much waste material to be used by others. My views and desires are entitled only to politeness. Very well, my youthful plotters, by Jove, there's Coldcream who has to be counted with."

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

I believe I stopped and put my hand on the opposite arm, as if I had a card up my sleeve. But the act, absurd as it was, brought its own reaction, as if I had assured myself that there really was no card there.

"Is there a Coldcream?" I asked aloud of a bird that was sitting on the top of a shadbush, "or is she another vacancy made for the occasion?" The bird said nothing, and I replied to myself, "I will write to Coldcream to-night," and just then the note of a tanager came across to me from the trees at the river, as if the summer had answered me with a bell.

I would go over to the Swirl and think it all out with a severe sense of duty, and thus be able to meet circumstances with the austere complacency of a disciplined mind. Then I strode along again as I felt my resolution reaching from my limbs into my mind, occasionally looking back just as though Coldcream might be pursuing me.

The portal of the woods was carpeted with moss, and I entered it noiselessly and preoccupied with my own musings, to come in sight of the Swirl, and, as I live, Polly herself, sitting by the side of the pagoda with her head in her hands, Niobe like, all tears. A more disconsolate little wreck I never before saw in such a frame of gold and green. Before she was aware of it, I was upon her, and had sat down beside her, putting out one authoritative hand as gently and firmly as I could, to keep her from going off in another flurry.

"Young woman," I said, calling to my gravity

I STRUGGLE WITH MY OWN WEB

the full aid of the vernacular, "we must have this thing out. I suppose you thought I was only made to dance a gavotte with."

"Why couldn't you let me alone?" she said, turning a wet face full upon me. It reminded me so clearly of those roses all falling to pieces, that it seemed as if I had used my speech, as I had used my cane, and she was shrinking, shattered, from the blow.

"I do not feel guilty of having designedly intruded upon you at any time," I said; "I was willing from the first to let you alone."

Perhaps I was overarming myself against her vivacious tongue with cool severity. But she looked so helpless that I felt instantly sure that her vivacity had all tumbled to pieces like those rose petals.

"I packed my trunk and went away. What did you bring me back for?" she asked.

"Polly," I replied, "you must see that some explanation is proper on your part. You made a pretty show of candour (a very good imitation it was, too) when we first met."

"And you nipped it in the bud. I wanted to tell you everything."

"Did you? I am glad to hear it. You can do it now."

"Oh, I am tired of it all now, and I am not of sufficient account to anybody to bother with it."

"But remember, that I still consider myself of sufficient account to expect it, and Charlie too

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

—he is of sufficient account, at least in my estimation."

"Then why don't you go to him? You probably understand him better than you do me. Did he ever deceive you?"

"I was proud to think that he never did. But that was before he met you, Polly."

"And I am a deceiving, frivolous, mischief-making thing, bent on ruining him."

"Do sit down, Polly, and try and act like a sensible woman. I did not say anything like that. I am trying my best to find out *what* you are."

"I am just a poor innocent girl who never wanted to deceive anybody, and between you all I feel like a guilty wretch."

"But if you will only sit down and make a clean breast of it, I am sure you will feel better. I shall."

In spite of myself I could not help admiring her as she stood there, in a piquant attitude of defence, her head up saucily, and her little handkerchief in her hand ready at intervals to give her eyes a dab.

"You make a great mistake," she said. "I refuse to be a culprit and make a confession. I haven't done a thing to be ashamed of."

"Now, now, Polly," I rejoined, as I shook my finger monitorily at her, "you know very well that you have committed two unpardonable sins. In the first place, you made Charlie fall in love with you."

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"I made him?"

"Yes. And it seems that would not satisfy you, but you must carry your mischief even farther."

"I must? How must I?"

"Why, you had to make his old father fall in love with you too."

She had retreated some feet away, and this acknowledgment seemed to catch her, as the sailors say, "all abaft" as she stood there. All those variant emotions of which her nature was composed tangled themselves up in her inquiring face, and so pretty was the look of wonder coming through half tears, that it is a mystery, now that I think of it, that I did not jump up and kiss her then and there. She sat down on the root of a tulip tree at a safe distance from me, regarding me with poised perplexity, in which there were some half-drowned gleams of her old roguishness reviving.

"What did you come here to Tuskaloo for?" I asked.

"Because I belong here. What did *you* come for? you do not belong here."

"It seems to me now," I said, "that I came down here because you and Charlie arranged it."

"What injustice. I told your son in New York that I was going home. I was sick of New York. I wanted to get away. I am always trying to get away and everybody prevents me. One day he came and told me that I could not get away. You were coming down here, and he would

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have to come with you. What had he to do with it — what had I to do with it?"

She was fairly started now, and her sense of wrong thawed her into volubility.

"When you came here and made your plans, I tried to get away again. I don't want to interfere with anything. Why can't you let me alone?"

"Perhaps," I said meditatively, as I gazed into the deep green Swirl, "perhaps it's because your going away would be the greatest interference of all. I suppose Charlie and you have about fixed everything in your minds, just how it should all end, if other persons would only let you alone. You would go off, and the next thing, he would go off after you. My views of the matter would not be of the slightest moment."

"You are doing him a great injustice," said Polly. "He is a young thing and cannot leave his father."

"And you tried to beguile him away. Polly, you are a young thing yourself. I am sorry to say you are a disappointment."

"So are you. What's the use talking any more about it. We are both disappointments. Let's part."

"Oh, I don't see any sense in that. Running away will not help matters. Anyway, I don't want you to run away from me."

"Well, I don't see how I can run away from Charlie without running away from you."

"But I want you to help me — and Charlie."

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You really have his interest at heart, haven't you?"

"No, I haven't. I'm going to have my own interest at heart, and I'm not going to be annoyed any more."

Up went the handkerchief for a dab, but as her head went up at the same time with a saucy jerk, one action neutralized the other.

"Don't worry, Polly," I said. "These things never turn out as bad as they at first sight seem to be. You will get over it," I added, with an indulgent imbecility, as I looked into the Swirl, that was smoothly eddying in oily vortices.

"Of course," she replied, "I'll get out of it."

"Can you get out of it nicely?"

"To be sure I can. I can go back to New York."

"To the theatre? I wouldn't do that, after leaving it. By the way, what made you leave it?"

"I didn't like it."

"That is not a good reason."

"People would not let me alone."

"Charlie told you he didn't like it?"

"No, he didn't."

"Didn't he? What did he tell you?"

"He said *you* wouldn't like it."

"Oh, you got out because I wouldn't like it."

"But you do like it now, don't you?"

"I neither like nor dislike it. What annoys me is that Charlie should have withdrawn from my confidence. He should have told me everything from the start."

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"Well, he wanted to, and—I wouldn't let him."

"And why wouldn't you let him, pray?"

"Because I wanted to tell you myself."

"Oh, it was arranged between you to tell me all about it, and you both failed to do it."

"I suppose so. But that's all done now. We didn't know what your plans were, and I didn't know how easily he could do what you desired. It's different now."

"What is different?"

"Charlie."

"In what respect?"

"Well, he is beginning to see now that he ought to do what you want him to do. He didn't see it so clearly before."

"Before? Before what?"

"Before he saw Io."

"Do you mean to tell me, Polly, that my son has no more strength of character than to fall in love with every pretty face he encounters?"

"Oh, it would be very impolite to tell you what I think about it."

"I shall not have him disparaged, Polly."

"No, consider his filial duty. He has more strength of character than I have, and more father."

It took all my mental power to separate her irony from her admiration, as she sat there perked up on the root of the tulip tree, like a French picture of the seventeenth century.

"I hope," she said, "you do not think I am

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mean enough to interfere with his duty, now that it is made plain to me."

"But it isn't as plain to me, my dear, as it was."

"No?"

Such a composite and amorphous "No" never could have been uttered before. I felt something like a little pang of pity as I looked at her sitting there bolt upright, for after all it was a most unwarrantable proceeding on my part. I should have gone my way, and had it, like a man, and not fooled away the time prying into a girl's wholly unreliable and inconsequential vagaries. But nobody ever goes away on such occasions. I stayed and grew weak and indulgent on account of the French picture.

"No," I said, "I don't think you should go away and carry such mistakes with you. Better stay and help me clear up matters. What is that bell ringing for?"

"That is your dinner—they are waiting for you."

"Then come along. Let us go to dinner."

"I don't want any dinner. Don't bother about me."

"But I shall bother," I said, getting up. "I shall not go back without you. If you do not come along, you will have the whole household out here looking for you again, and then our little private affairs will be betrayed to everybody."

As she stood up I approached her, seeing that there was a sign of irresolution.

"Let me wipe your eyes," I said, taking her

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

handkerchief and dipping it into the Swirl. "We need not exhibit our feelings any more than is necessary."

She let me do some gentle dabbing myself, and looked up at me half wonderingly, like a child, with her handsome blue eyes full of a tender, liquid light, and I thought to myself that Charlie was not such a fool after all. She had another dry handkerchief handy with which she wiped the water from her face, and while she was doing it, I leaned over, and before she knew it had kissed her on the forehead paternally and even forgivingly, and got ahead of all protest by saying:—

"Come along, now, you look like the morning star again."

She was passive and unresisting and allowed me to pull her arm under mine, and then we started on our way back to the house.

I tried to make her feel that the subject was dismissed for the time being, but a young woman's emotions are very tenacious, and my endeavours to assume a light and airy tone about irrelevant things were regarded somewhat suspiciously, I thought, as more becoming an old and practised deceiver, and her volubility did not return at once. Just before we arrived at the house, I said:—

"Polly, no matter what occurs, there is no good reason why we should not remain fast friends and keep our own counsel, is there?"

"It would be great fun to keep one friend through thick and thin," she replied. "I should like to try it."

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"So you shall. But we mustn't do any acting, remember that."

We were too late to join the family at dinner, and partook of our meal tête-à-tête. Boylston had brought some letters for me, which I found upon the table. I put them in my pocket and gave myself entirely to the pleasant task of convincing Polly that I had not lost my good humour. It was somewhat interfered with by "Mother," who presently joined us and evinced considerable curiosity, in her discreet way, about our absence from the family dinner, and I thought was trying to make out through her spectacles what the exact condition of Polly's eyes was; at which that young lady turned on their electric vivacity on purpose to baffle her, and there ensued a very pretty little game of Hunt the Slipper between them, which I admired very much.

"Io," said Polly, "is out on the rose bench with Mr. Charlie, isn't she?"

"Is she?" said Mother, meekly. "Why, Mr. Fancher is in the parlour talking to the Doctor."

"Oh, then they are waiting there on the bench for him to bring the news of his interview," said Polly.

Before we had finished our meal and the candles were lighted, we heard Mr. Fancher ride away, and immediately after came the sound of the Doctor's tread on the afternoon porch, and then a cheery call to us to come out in the twilight.

I joined him, but Polly disappeared in another direction. We sat down there in the dying rose

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light, and he told me that Mr. Fancher had been to see him with regard to Io. "I guess," he said, "the matter will turn out all right, so far as we are concerned."

"Did he make a formal proposal to you?"

"I suppose he thought it was a proposal, but it was more like a pronunciamiento."

"He is desirous of marrying Miss Io?"

"He warned me that such was his intention. I thanked him for his frankness and told him I should do everything in my power to prevent it. He wanted to know if I had made other arrangements for the young lady. I told him I had. He said she was of age. I acknowledged it, but told him she was also under bonds. He seemed to think that he could exercise more authority with her than I could, and I believe we locked horns in a gentlemanly fashion about it. But he preserved his good humour, and, to show that he had no resentment, invited my whole household up to their tournament at the Club House, and I, not to be outdone in civility, agreed to have my whole establishment there."

"Doctor," I said, "it seems to me that a great deal of time might be saved by ascertaining the young lady's views in the matter."

"My dear sir," replied the Doctor, "I have before mentioned the fact that the young lady has no views — merely impressions — and that is decidedly to our advantage; for, as I understand it, both you and I have decided views. Mr. Fancher asked me very bluntly if I objected to telling him

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in what respect I thought his success would be disadvantageous to the lady."

"Did you tell him?"

"I certainly did. I was not going to be outdone in candour by the fellow, so I told him that if he didn't tire of her in a year, she would of him. He merely smiled and thought that was a hasty conclusion. We shook hands and parted like two business men who intend to get the best of each other if they can."

"Perhaps, after all," I said, "the young people may be intended for each other and it would be folly to interfere with them. Mr. Fancher is well fixed and moves in good society."

"Confound it," said the Doctor, "that sounds slightly pusillanimous to me. We have made up our minds as to the best course to pursue, and now you throw up your hands."

"But I don't see the case as clearly as you do. It may be easier to stave off Mr. Fancher than to lure on my son. You see you have two young ladies in the house. I do not say that Miss Io is not the most resplendent in personal charms (and I felt a little twitch of reproach as I said it and thought of Polly's wet violet eyes looking up into mine), but the other young lady is not destitute of attractions."

"What — Bob?" he exclaimed, and then went to the door and looked in to see that Bob was not anywhere about listening, and continued — "Bob doesn't figure in our calculations, and I don't intend that she shall. If she does, I'll pack her

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off to New York and let her earn her own living."

It was very evident from this speech that the Doctor had no part in Polly's intrigue, and from a sheer sense of pity for her I felt reluctant to tell him of it. So I said:—

"Our conclusions will be premature before we ascertain which way the tide sets—I mean the current of young blood. I will have a serious talk with my son, and I would suggest that you pin Miss Io down to a confession, and then we can compare results."

The Doctor's reply showed very plainly that, sagacious as he was in most worldly affairs, he was no expert in dealing with love's young dream. He had made up his mind to a match between Miss Io and Charlie, and he regarded her in the matter as passive material quite incapable of seriously opposing his desires.

"It will not do," he said, "to let the natural currents have their own way, when a little guidance will bring them into the proper channel. I regard Mr. Fancher's bold declaration as an advantage. If your son has the slightest amount of spirit, it will awaken his opposition. It usually acts that way,—and you will allow me to speak of your son as partaking of the common qualities of youth."

"Alas, yes," I said, "it was the common qualities of youth that brought me down here. At least, I thought so."

"Then," said the Doctor, "having escaped

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from the snare, the best we can do is to regulate things with our good sense for the benefit of all parties. In my profession we learn soon enough that to guide and assist Nature is the best plan. We cannot destroy the appetites, but we can steer them."

Considering all that Polly had said to me, this did not appear to be a very comfortable conclusion, and I got as far as to say, "But Polly, Doctor—" when he cut me short as usual with an idiom:—

"Bob doesn't cut any ice. I reserve Bob for myself. I like to have her twitter and stick her bill into matters that she doesn't understand. The peculiar charm of such a woodpecker is that she doesn't require any serious attention."

After this conversation, which left me in somewhat of a dilemma, I was desirous of having a heart-to-heart talk with my son, and that night he came into my room just as I had pulled the letters from my pocket and laid them on the table. I came at him directly.

"Well, Comrade, I saw you on the rose bench with Miss Io—making love?"

He looked at me inquiringly. "Trying to do my duty," he said.

"Was it painful?"

"Well, no. I never found it very painful to carry out your wishes, and in this case it is rather pleasant. One must kill time somehow down here."

"Now look here, don't load your responsibility

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upon me. I never had any wishes in the matter that you were aware of."

He stood there looking at me with the same inquiring expression. Then he said:—

"Hasn't Polly told you?"

"Yes. Polly has made a clean breast of it."

"I hope you treated her kindly. It wasn't her fault."

"No. It was yours. You at least were under obligations of confidence."

"I was the victim—innocent victim—of circumstances. They were your circumstances."

"Mine?"

"Why, yes. This was your trip, not mine. I was thinking of you in the whole matter. It seemed to me that you were about to sacrifice yourself."

I laughed somewhat derisively. "You are thinking of Madame Coldcream," I said. "Dismiss her—dismiss her. Let's talk about Miss Io—she's more to the point."

"Have you dismissed Madame Coldcream?"

"My boy, look here,—if I dismiss Madame Coldcream, will you dismiss Polly?"

"Good heavens, Governor, that sounds as if you had made up your mind to substitute Polly for Madame Coldcream."

"Don't be frivolous," I said, with an effort to be stern. "Try and tell me exactly what your attitude is in this matter."

"I think it is one of filial obedience," and he turned his back on me as he said it. "I try to

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adapt myself to your views, but they change so confoundedly that it is becoming difficult."

This aggravated me a little, coming from a youngster who was ready at the slightest provocation to give up one woman for another.

"Change!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that I would make love to one estimable young lady to-day, and make love to another estimable young lady to-morrow, because some one desired it? You must have a pitiable notion of my stability of character."

"Look here, Governor, it isn't a fair comparison. You haven't a father."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Oh, a great deal. You ought to look at the thing practically. You certainly gave me to understand that you intended to marry Madame Coldcream, because she was such a good manager of financial affairs, and had such a nice son who wanted money. Well, of course, that put a different face on my affairs. I couldn't marry a poor girl, and I had to look out for one with an income to accommodate you and Madame Coldcream and her son. When I do my best to adapt myself, you change your mind with regard to marrying Madame Coldcream. You will pardon me, there wasn't much rhyme or reason in your choice, and there seems to be less in your change of mind."

"Madame Coldcream was a mere fantasy," I exclaimed, "and you cannot use that respectable lady as an excuse. We can dismiss her, but can

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you dismiss Polly without a pang? Are you, then, one of those heartless men who trifle with a girl's affections and throw them aside at any caprice?"

"You will have to make some allowance for me, Dad. I never had but one example set before me."

"Rubbish—you are talking nonsense. My feelings for that estimable woman, Madame Coldcream, were those of respectful appreciation, and I have not changed them. But as to marrying, I can change my views, I suppose, without any recreancy or dishonour, seeing that the whole matter was one of convenience."

"Oh," said Charlie, "then you have given up that idea?"

"Yes, yes. Let us stick to the really important matter in hand, which is Miss Io. Did you know that Mr. Fancher had made an avowal to the Doctor?"

"Oh, yes. Io told me."

"Then she knew it. What did she say about it?"

"I don't remember that she said anything definite. She seemed to regard it as quite the regular course of affairs. Mr. Fancher is the fifth or sixth. I suppose these things lose their edge in time."

"Suppose Mr. Fancher gets her?"

"Well, then, I suppose I can change my views without any recreancy, seeing that it would be a matter of convenience."

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"But have you no blood, no passion, no youthful fire — not a single emotion? What the deuce are you yawning for?"

"To tell you the truth, I'm a little tired and sleepy. You will pardon me, Dad, but the sudden disappearance of Madame Coldcream leaves me a little limp."

"Very well," I said, with a strong effort at sternness, "go to bed. But to-morrow I expect you to bring Polly and let me talk to the two of you, and stop this disgraceful business somehow. And I don't want to hear any more about Madame Coldcream. Good night. I am going to read my letters."

"Good night, Dad," he said, and, coming up behind me, he put his arm familiarly round my neck and added: "We were awfully jolly in our New York quarters, before Madame Coldcream and the rest of them interfered with us. Suppose we go back."

"No, sir," I said, bringing my fist down on the table to preserve the air of grimness. "No, sir — we stay here and fight it out. Good night."

I settled down in my chair and opened the first letter. It was from my half-sister, Mrs. Petunia Dewey, and this is what it said: —

MY DEAR RUFUS: — I have not heard a word from you, and do not know which of you has taken the best care of the other. But I have a surprise for you, which I think will gladden your blasé heart. I have received an invitation from our old friend Mr. Berwick Fancher to come down to the annual tournament of the Game

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Club, and I have invited Madame Coldcream to join me. By the way, I have told her of your admiration, and I think you will find the way made quite smooth for you when she arrives, for she has promised to accompany me, and I have written to the Doctor by this mail informing him of our visit, with a request to wire us if his accommodations are not ample. I trust, my dear Rufus, that you will make the most of this visit, for the more I think of it the more I am satisfied that both you and your son need a practical woman at the head of affairs, and I have done all that can be done to pave the way.

Affectionately yours,

PETUNIA DEWEY.



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CHAPTER IX

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

THIS letter completely threw me off my mental balance. Fate sometimes is a Nemesis trying to play the Merry Andrew. It isn't pleasant. It annoys one to have serious matters masquerade. Destiny, I said to myself, has a serious rôle to play, and this is too ridiculous. Madame Cold-cream coming here, is she? Then, by the inexorable demands of business, I can pack my gripsack and hie me to New York to-morrow on a matter of vital importance. What is it Maeterlinck says about destiny being a blear-eyed bowman, aiming straight ahead, but if the target be raised somewhat higher than usual, the arrows pass underneath? Good; I'll raise the target, and go back to New York.

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Having adjusted destiny to my own schedule, I went to bed, and so well satisfied was I that I could at least dodge the bleary-eyed jade, that I went to sleep.

I woke up the next morning, and, looking at myself in the glass, saw with satisfaction that I had a well-defined expression of decision round my mouth. I prided myself that it was the mature expression that belongs to such an act as is called "taking the bull by the horns."

But those summer mornings at Tuskaloo, when all the ephemeral annoyances of life fled from the memory and nothing remained but the glory of the hour! Those glittering moments sang together a new symphony of life, and it was impossible not to feel, despite all the conditions of one's mind, that these were transitional and transcendent moments when dumb material uttered its elemental rhythmus with effluent unison, and the vivid sunlight, the cool shadows, the dewy, rose-scented air, and the disturbance of the birds were all parts of the same uplifting oratorio. I walked about as I attired myself and tried to suppress an inclination to whistle, because in a resolute frame of mind whistling is not consistent. But when all the elements about one are kicking up a roulade, it is difficult to suppress one's automatic sympathies. I looked into my companion's room. He was gone. Wayward youth, I said, he has no sense of the seriousness of life; and just then the pulse of air that came in my vine-covered window brought with it a stave of human

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song, itself rose-scented and softly exultant,—a mere snatch of song that seemed to have tumbled into expression out of the condition of things and was going its bright way with the hurrying hours. But how well I knew it—a strain of “*Lucia di quest Anima*,”—just that bobolink burst, and I knew that Polly was somewhere mixed up in the dewy shadows, exulting like all other things without considering. All the old associations of that bubbling *romanza* were touched in me, and I listened with my head cocked on one side and, I dare say, with a smile of recognition on my face that must have diluted my decision. Polly was somewhere at a softening distance contributing to the morning fund. I felt sure she was in the wet grass, with her buckled shoes, colloquing with the robins, and that if I listened long enough I should hear a stave of the song in “*Dinorah*,” and know that she was mocking the birds with “*Si Carina*,” and presently would catch up her skirts and go pirouetting round in the “*Shadow Song*,” just to show those pretentious robins how much better she could do it. I suppose every exultant girl has a casket of a voice into which the old masters have at some time dropped their little jewels, and these mornings open the lid and let them shine.

All the domestic elements in my comedy were assembled at the breakfast table, all wearing the morning on their unlike visages, and I alone trying to look judiciously malapropos with my sense of impending danger. They were all keyed

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up to the auroral gayety of heart, and the Doctor began his fanfare as soon as we were seated.

"Good news for all of you!" he said. "Have to brush up the old ranch, and get out our laced and embroidered hospitality. High-stepping company coming."

We all looked at him with a keen interest, I alone suspecting what was impending.

"We are to have a tournament in the mountains at the Club House," he said; "that you know. But what you do not know is that some old friends of mine are coming to it from New York. I have a letter from your sister," he said, looking at me, "Madame Petunia Dewey, announcing her intended visit here to renew her old acquaintance with me and to look after her brother; and she brings with her a friend, Madame Cold-cream."

This announcement, so confidently and jovially made, did not fall upon all of us with the same enlivenment. Charlie, who sat opposite me, let his two hands come down upon the table, holding his knife and fork in them, and stared at me with his eyes propped very wide open by inquiry, and his mouth partly open as if to accommodate a little gasp. Io, who sat next him, was alone unperturbed, and went placidly on taking her coffee by the spoonful. Io, as usual, was superior to any vagrant emotions.

There was a moment of silence, and then the voices all broke out together.

"I suppose you were also notified of the visit,"

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said Charlie, still boring at me with his wide-open eyes.

Polly, by my side, was leaning forward trying to look into my face, — I felt that she was anxious to see how Charlie's look affected me, — and Mother's household anxiety surmounted everything.

"Why, Doctor," she said, "you know we've only one upstairs maid, and all the woollens in the extra chambers are put away for the summer; the muslin curtains are not up, and the mosquito frames are all in the barn."

"They will have to take pot-luck," said the Doctor. "Madame Dewey I know very well, and she will accommodate herself to circumstances. As for the other lady, I presume my friend Rufus can vouch for her adaptability to our barbarism."

"A most estimable lady of the old school, Doctor," I said, "and sure to add distinction to your group."

"And that is just what our group needs. When it comes to tournaments, we shall need a chaperon."

"But we do not need two, do we?" asked Polly. "Who's the other one for?"

"Bob," said the Doctor, "always speaks as if there were only one young lady in the house."

"Naturally," replied Polly, "when I don't count. But isn't it rather late for a chaperon?"

"A good chaperon ought to be a great relief to all of you," said Io, holding a piece of omelette in the air with her fork.

"It strikes me," said Mother, "that you are

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

speaking somewhat disrespectfully of our coming guests. As they are friends of Mr. Fancher's, I think we ought to try and match them in politeness and courtesy."

"Perhaps," said Polly, "they are coming to chaperon Mr. Fancher."

"That will do, Bob," said the Doctor. "Please keep your twitters until after meals. You do not need a chaperon — only a policeman. You must understand that the ladies are not only Mr. Fancher's friends, but the friends of Charlie and his father."

"I beg your pardon, I only know one of the ladies — she is my aunt," said Charlie.

"Oh, you'll learn to appreciate the other lady's good qualities, from all I hear," observed the Doctor, looking at me with a particularly sly expression.

But Charlie tried to rise to the occasion and remarked, "I have heard of the lady, and I am quite anxious to see her and satisfy myself if she be a fact or a fantasy."

I was getting impaled on both sides now, and I didn't like it.

"Fantasy, my boy?" exclaimed the Doctor, "whose fantasy? Yours?"

"No, indeed," replied Charlie, "not mine."

"Can I twitter, please?" asked Polly, demurely.

"No, not a twit, my dear. It strikes me that you are putting a rather flippant aspect on a very important event. I expect this establishment to assume its highest tone and wear its best bib and

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tucker on the arrival of our honoured guests. The visit may result in some very interesting, not to say serious, considerations. At all events, we must do our best to preserve the record of this house in high-toned gayety and hospitality."

They all promptly avowed their willingness to do all in their power, but I could feel Charlie stare at me as if he were inquiring of himself if, after all, his Dad was a consummate old deceiver. Nevertheless, the Doctor's voluble good spirits overrode everything.

"We'll make it antiques and rustically warm for them," he said, "and if we all work together, matters will go as merry as a — well" (looking at Io and then at me), "as merry as a marriage bell."

When the breakfast was over I went immediately to my chamber, where I felt sure Charlie would seek me for an explanation. How I was to act in the matter I scarcely knew at the moment. It occurred to me that the apparent collusion of myself and Madame Coldcream might enable me still to hold the whip-hand over Charlie. Should I tell him the truth — that I had nothing whatever to do with the visit, or should I let him think that I had? In the one case I might sacrifice my advantage, in the other I might sacrifice his respect for me. Before I had made up my mind he was upon me. He came in with a rather brusque manner, I thought, shutting the door after him.

"Say, Dad, you ought to treat me squarely. There's not one chance in a hundred that

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

Madame Coldcream would come here unless you wanted her."

"My son," I said, "I had no hand in bringing her here, but now that she is coming it may be of some practical advantage to me."

"Practical advantage?" he exclaimed. "You said last night she was a fantasy and I was to dismiss her. Did you know she was coming when you said that?"

This direct appeal to my sincerity was very hard to dodge, and I was afraid that the intrigue would sooner or later disturb his faith in me.

"Certainly not," I replied. "But now that she is coming, of course the fantasy idea will have to be given up. She is determined to convert herself into a living fact, it seems. But that is a matter that need not give you any uneasiness."

"But it does. I do not like to have Madame Coldcream suspended above me like the sword of Damocles, liable to fall at any moment."

"Explain yourself."

"I mean that it is better to have done with it — to have her fall, than to have her always impending. If you and I must go different ways, why, I suppose the best thing to do is to brace ourselves and accept the decree."

"Oh, you feel that way, do you?" and I could feel myself collapsing at this first assertion of independence. "Look here, Charlie, it sounds as if you had made your programme much more definitely than I have. I can invent an excuse to get out of this — urgent business in New York."

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We can go back to our rooms and dodge Madame Coldcream if she annoys you."

He was standing near the table, and, striking his fist upon it in exact imitation of his Dad, he said : —

"No, sir. I stay here and fight it out. I've never had but one model, and I have tried to imitate it pretty closely, — even in its lightning changes. Let the Damoclean Coldcream fall."

This was fairly hoisting me with my own petard, whether Charlie was aware of it or not. I did not want Madame Coldcream to fall — at least upon myself, and after considering a moment, I told him so.

"Then," said he, "I cannot understand why you should want to run away, just as matters are approaching a crisis here."

"Oh, they are getting interesting, are they? I suspected as much."

"Suspected? You desired it, didn't you? See here, Dad, I think I have been a pretty docile son. I've tried my best to adapt myself to your changing moods, but I'm blessed if I can do it any more unless you give me a route of them. Your mind is getting so eccentric that it changes over night. Yesterday, Madame Coldcream was a fantasy. To-day she is a fact. What she will be to-morrow, I shudder to think. A week ago, you were scared to death because you thought I had fallen in love with a church-mouse, and in a spirit of the most self-sacrificing, filial obedience, I tore the church-mouse out of my

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heart and proceeded to fall in love with a wax Venus. Instead of calming your mind and bringing it round to its normal gait, I'm blessed if you haven't gone off at another turn and act as though you were indignant because I didn't defy you in the first place."

"Easy, easy, my boy. I didn't know how far matters had gone."

"Didn't you? Then what made you so anxious to get me away from New York?"

"Why, you young ingrate, it was you who were anxious to get me away. You were scared to death by Madame Coldcream, and now you want her to fall upon me like the wolf upon the fold. Talk about an eccentric mind,—look at yourself and blush. Why, it was only last night you wanted to go back to our rooms."

"Pure regard for you, sir. I am learning to put my own desires in these matters entirely at your disposal and prepare for anything. I have told Io that I love her. I didn't expect a medal for it, but I certainly did expect some consideration for my obedience."

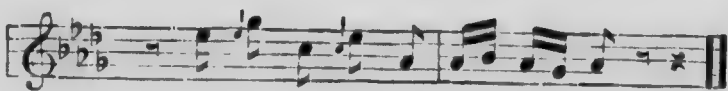
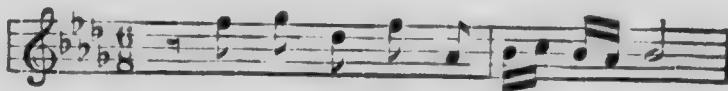
"But confound it, sir, you told the other girl that you loved her too. Must I inform you that no man of our stock would lead an innocent girl to believe that he loved her, and then coolly desert her for the first good-looking woman he met? What would you think of me if I did such a thing?"

"You labour under some disadvantages, Dad—you haven't a father."

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"But this is a serious matter, my boy, to trifle with a girl's heart, and the worst of crimes to break it. That poor girl may be crying her eyes out now on your account. By Jove, sir, I saw tears in her eyes, and it went to my heart. I don't know how you feel, but there is something shameful in the mere possibility of a double game of this kind."

We were looking at each other rather seriously, and at that moment there came through the roses at the window a snatch of that same scented song:—



It stopped short, and Charlie said:—

"There are no tears in that, Dad. Why in thunder doesn't she finish it?"

"Ah," I said pensively, "it is like a broken column."

"Do you think so? It seems to me like a cash payment on the instalment plan. You said you wanted to see us together. Why not give her a yodel out of the window? Troll the rest of that song. You know it. I've heard you whistle it."

He looked at his watch. "Ta-ta," he said,

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"I promised Io to go with her for a gallop before the sun got up."

"Go your way," I said. "I will have a talk with Polly alone."

"That's good of you — you comfort her and cheer her up like you do me. I'll be back in an hour, and maybe by that time you will have a new idea."

I went down and sat on the big veranda, where I lit a cigar and tried to give myself up to the morning swoon. But there is no nepenthe in such a morning. The days at Tuskaloo were all arranged on an electric plan, each with its poles, very positive at one end and negative at the other, full of stimulant matin influences at the beginning and tapering off at the end with slumberous sedatives in the gloaming.

Presently the Doctor joined me. His heavy tread on the porch made the boards creak as if even the old lumber of the place had sharp tiny voices that could be called into service. He had on his nankeen jacket, a soft, yellow, unstarched roundabout with big side pockets, out of one of which hung a silk bandanna like a toreador's, and his immaculate duck trousers gleamed round his massive legs with ample coolness. He took off the broad Panama hat, fanned his ruddy face with it once or twice, and, taking in all the inspiration of the moment, said, with a lusty, comprehensive breath:—

"Well, my old friend, it is for this we toil and spin."

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"True," I replied. "There are some moments here that are too bright to belong to time. They seem to have filtered down from eternity."

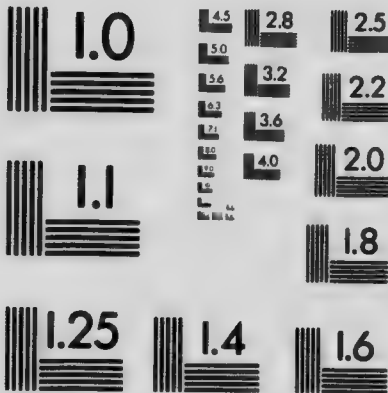
"My dear fellow," he said, pulling up another big Quaker rocker, and disposing himself in it like a rajah who has included Nirvana in his assets, "my dear fellow, we apportion our feelings off to the hours. If we could keep our morning freshness till evening, everything would glitter and sing in the dusks as it does in the dawns. It is not that there is any more joy afloat in the morning, it is because we are better attuned. It's a fact, — after seven or eight hours of enforced faith in the Unseen — absolute self-abnegation in sleep — we get up brimful of the Eternal and think it has just arrived. We wear our faith out before nightfall, and then, because the fumes of earth make the sun go down murky, we become pessimists. I like to catch a man in the morning, when he is at concert pitch, before he is self-jangled. Then everything is at early mass. If I wanted to convert men I'd begin at daybreak, when the souls are already half converted and don't know it. Religion is a matin hymn, and I suppose love is too, — our young lovers have gone away into the dew and sunshine. I saw them ride off."

He said this jocularly enough, but it sounded rather melancholy to me. I don't know why.

"Io has acknowledged to me that your son is an attractive young man. Attractive, my friend. Weigh that word from a girl's mouth. Io is not



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volatile and effusive like Polly, but there is ever reason to believe that the wind sets from the right quarter and I do not mind saying frankly to you that it is a great relief to me."

Now, what would you have done in such case? I mean you who are reading this page. I think I see you drawing yourself up with that severe ethical judgment that is given to us only when we read, seldom indeed when we act, and saying, If I had emitted so many fine sentiments and put such a high estimate on sincerity and frankness as you have done, I would try and act up to my theories, tell the Doctor the plain truth, and be hanged to the tangle.

You would, would you? You would tell the Doctor that Polly had deceived him; that Charlie had lent himself to the deception; that we had been pretending to run away from a temptation and had followed it up, making the Doctor participant criminis. You would say to him, I have pretended to lend myself to your scheme, but I was not honest, and now that Charlie is making love to Io, I think he ought to marry Polly. And you would still eat the Doctor's salt.

Consider. I was not sure that Charlie ought to marry Polly, nor was I entirely certain that she would break her heart if he didn't. Let me remind you again that if the men who write books were as strong and direct as the men who read them, there would be an end of all romance. If I had shown the slightest inclination to be as frank as the circumstances seemed to demand, the Doc-

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tor would have gone off, hunted up that letter I wrote him from New York and flourished it in my face. Would it not have been extremely selfish on my part to disturb, simply on account of a pair of blue eyes, the relationship which was growing up between Io and Charlie? Then, too, the Doctor had made it very plain that his interest in the future of the estate would be assured by the arrangements he was making. He did not say clearly how, but I suspected that he needed fresh capital to continue his generous patriarchal life.

"Doctor," I said, feeling my way along guardedly, "Doctor, what are you going to do with Polly?"

"Ah," he said, "there you touch me. She belongs to the atmosphere of the place, one of those appurtenances with which you must not do anything. I cannot bear to think of the ultimate evaporation of Bob. Her twitter is as much a part of the sunshine and song of the long evening of my life, as is Nature herself, and gives it the zest of morning. But I suppose that bubble must burst. Some confounded yokel, like a hawk, will come along and pick her up and fly away with her, and then, why then, things will grow silent and gray. I have allowed myself to drift into a comfortable delusion that, come what may, Bob will be always somewhere about, swinging on a spray and twittering. It's rather foolish, I admit, but it is the penalty of having no Bobs of your own."

"Yes," I said, "I can understand that. It

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makes us old fellows wish that we were thirty years younger."

"Then we should not appreciate it. A young man doesn't care for atmosphere, he wants avoirdupois."

"Doctor, Polly weighs at least a hundred and forty. She is heavier than you think. I wouldn't estimate her by her twitters, and she is not a bad looking girl, either."

"Yes, yes; it takes sixty or seventy years to estimate Bob's weight. I see you have arrived at years of discretion, and then, our faculties are keen in the morning. You always were susceptible just after breakfast. I remember how you tried to build an ivory throne in the Hotchkiss woods for a milkmaid. Well, well, I shall not blame you, — in the morning, when the universe is flirting with itself. I felt like singing when I saw your boy galloping off an hour ago. Yes, I did. I haven't got much voice left, but my memory is good and an old ballad slipped through my mind as if it had Polly's buckled shoes on: —

"And as he lingered at her side,
Despite his comrade's warning,
The old, old story was told again
At five o'clock in the morning.

Do you remember how Parepa Rosa sang that homespun ballad years ago, with her sunrise voice making daybreak for dusky souls?"

The Doctor was reminiscent and human — in the morning.

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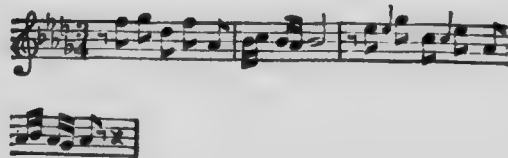
"It is always the old, old story," he said. "The best we can do is to sit on the shore and watch the old springtides flushing."

Somehow it did not appeal to me in exactly the same way. I saw a pair of violet eyes looking up into mine, suffused and appealing. They remained to me the most eloquent eyes I had ever looked in. It was plain that the Doctor had never detected their pathos.

But all this was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a horn on the road.

"Aha," exclaimed the Doctor, jumping up. "Our guests, — and Boylston is making an ass of himself with a horn."

We could hear the horses coming, and presently the laughter of voices. I had just time to breathe a transitory hope to myself that Madame Coldcream had been left behind, when the equipage turned in at the gate dramatically, with Mr. Fancher galloping by its side; and there was Madame Coldcream sure enough on the front seat, just as large and resolute as life itself, and as they came jingling up to the veranda in the highest of spirits, there came faintly from the distance the vanishing strain so like a receding bobolink's: —





CHAPTER X

IN WHICH I BECOME A NONENTITY

THE old Manse wore a livelier air of contemporaneous life when these visitors came to it. My excellent half-sister Petunia Dewey fluttered the Mater of the house, you may be sure. It was such an event to have personages of affairs come this way from a seething centre and sit down at the archaic board and make the recluses feel how provincial they were! But the Doctor gave no heed to such consideration. His exuberant hospitality stopped not at trifles, but went on its overflowing way without recognizing any new responsibilities. I think that he exulted a little, as a provincial parriarch might, in being able to show off his rusty courtliness to such good advantage.

The moment that all the preliminary greetings and welcomings were over and the guests were

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adjusted to the menage, Petunia pulled me away to herself and came at me with interrogations as the crow flies.

"What is the situation here?" she asked.

"Have you and your precious scion taken such good care of each other that the inevitable is a back number?"

"Petunia," I said, "you are disingenuous. You probably know that I ran away from a temptation only to rush into its arms. Between you and all I have been made the dupe of my own solicitude."

"That is interesting," she exclaimed. "Tell me all about it."

"I would if it could possibly have any novelty for you."

But Petunia vowed that she had not the slightest idea what I was talking about, and sometimes her vows wore the aspect of sincerity. So I told her, making my explanations as brief as possible. She was frankly amazed, and disavowed all complicity.

"It is not a plot," she said. "It is fate."

"Then permit me to say that fate is a bungling playwright. No sooner does it arrange its dénouement than the actors strike. My wayward scion appears to have fallen in love with the leading lady here."

"Then it is not fate that has miscarried, but the stage manager."

"Who is the stage manager?"

"You. You have changed your point of view."

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"My son has changed his point of view."

"And for some reason that I do not understand, you appear to regret it."

"Yes, I cannot help feeling annoyed at exhibition of such wayward susceptibility. I rather counted on the fellow's stubborn loyalty to his first love."

"Then he has fallen in love again. He is vivacious, isn't he?"

"He has had his youthful sensibilities touched by a new face."

"Then, in Heaven's name, Rufus, let Nature take its course this time, if there are no other new faces here. I warn you that I shall throw all my influence on the side of Nature, unless you tell me that the latest is out of our class."

Petunia's estimate of these things was entirely social. Like a great many other estimable women she had relegated her conscience to her set. It was useless for me to tell her that I was governed in the matter by the fitness that insured the future.

"You observed Miss Io," I said, "and probably measured her charms if not her capacity. Isn't she a beautiful girl?"

"She is good-looking enough," replied Petunia with a woman's conservatism when speaking of other women, "good-looking enough as girls go. The question is, Is she able to take her place in the circle that your son will move in?"

"As to that," I said, "I suppose that with such a face and figure, the circle, whatever it may be, will square itself to her authority."

"Humph," she observed. "It is very evident that you and the Doctor have arranged it. I didn't think you were so lively."

"We have recognized it."

"Where is the other one, into whose arms I understood you to say you had rushed? Is that arranged, too?"

Now, the "other one" had withdrawn into the background. I presumed that, like myself, she had made up her mind that it was folly to oppose the inevitable, and was over at the Lodge, packing her trunk. At all events, she was not in evidence; so I could not expect Petunia to make any immediate comparisons, and I said:—

"See here, Petunia, I have only one desire in this matter, and it is that boy's future. I don't care a rap for what you call his or his wife's social position."

"Since when did you execute this lightning change?" she asked.

"What I want," I continued, "is to secure his future domestic happiness, and if I felt sure that his present susceptibility would insure it, I should give no further thought to the matter. But that is just where I am baffled. Such beauty as Io's is sphinxine, at least to a man. I have been here some time, and I know no more of Io's character than when I came; and the worst of it is, she appears to know that she can dazzle any man's judgment by looking at him."

"What rubbish!" said Petunia. "The only amiable weakness that you have not outgrown is

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an inveterate quality of sex. She can't da
me."

"I know it. Therefore I expect you to
me your unblinking judgment."

"Let me see them together, and I will tell y
all about it. These dazzlers have one excell
quality — they are transparent."

If Miss Io had known that Madame Dewe
eye was upon her and going through her dur
that visit, I think it would have given her
extra charm of nervousness. And yet, now th
I think of it, how do I know that Io's eye w
not placidly on Madame herself, making
equal inventory and defying her? Who can fo
low these reciprocal processes? The wom
probably read each other through and throug
and never for one moment acknowledged ea
other's acumen.

I hope the reader perceives the dilemma
which I was placed, and understands my furth
dilemma in being the narrator of what the read
fondly believes is a love story. When did th
reader get a love story from the father's point o
view? It is a most incredible undertaking for
man of my age, for a father has qualms. H
may carry, as I did, his susceptibility to beaut
up to the edge of the sear and yellow, but, con
found it! he carries his experience also, and the
are sure to lock horns. He turns over the pag
of the new book and the rhetoric holds him with
its fresh glitter. But he knows the trite plot a
a glance. Most of the veterans, they tell me

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leave the theatre at the end of the second act. They have seen the new beauty and they know the rest. Nobody ever thinks of getting a new plot, only of seeing a new woman. That is why popular plays depend on the relays, not on the reason.

The only advantage that a father has in trying to tell a love story, is that he is a little suspicious of superlative beauty. It is no longer a guarantee. He has learned, perhaps, that Nature's purpose in getting up what we call her divinities, is wholly dissociated from anything but her own idea of fecundity, and that consequently she often adorns the shallowest souls with the most regal lines and colours. It takes a man generally about forty years to learn that real beauty is like Truth—like Truth, I cry you shame. It is Truth, and it never bursts upon the vision, outside of the current novel, with the blazon of voluptuous facts, but glimmers up slowly according to the law of evolution, and shines securely when Aphrodite is grown obese and dull.

What the world has consented to call beauty in a woman ever since the Argive Helen, is often a vacuum which that same world rushes to fill with its fancies. When beauty consents to die, or, what is worse, to live beyond its attractiveness, we can discover nothing but the vagaries we imputed to it.

I suppose, if the truth must be told, that I was mean enough to harbor a skulking distrust of Miss Io. Her imperious superiority to all

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the demands of a father, her unauthorized sovereignty of line and colour aggravated me in some unknown way. She often looked at me with a mild and matchless contempt that only I could interpret, for it said to me, "Pish, for your years of watchfulness and of anxious guardianship! override them all with contour and the divine right of effulgence."

I was not sure, even while experiencing this unworthy feeling, that I was not doing her great injustice. One thing I am sure of. I never came under the spell of her beauty without feeling the absence of something. I dare say I was foolish enough to think of an overflowing girlhood somewhere; something scintillant, in buckled shoes; daring to throw its arms about my neck; now looking at the shadows of its own temperament through tears, and now dancing gavotte — interpreting itself like a wind harp, and the breath of heaven touched it. And then I wondered at the majestic keyboard of this other instrument which kept every player at distance.

I had already learned that there are two occasions in a father's life when he is expected to become a nonentity. One is a birth and the other is a death. I had now to learn that there are three, and a marriage must be added to the periods of self-extinction, when your friends push you aside and take upon themselves the management of what looks to you like your destiny. Now that I had a marriageable son,

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my individuality was kindly reminded on all sides that it should remain at zero.

The Doctor caught me by the arm and walked me up and down his veranda with complacent patronage.

"Now that the house wears a gala-day aspect," said he, "we might top off with a wedding. What do you say? Suppose we seize the opportunity and tie the knot."

I shrank a little at this unexpected precipitancy.

"Better wait awhile," I said. "There is nothing gained by taking the matter out of its natural course."

"Certainly not, certainly not; but, having ascertained the natural course and determined the result, we might as well arrive at it and have done with it. Just tell your youngster to fix the day, while the company is here; to strike while the iron is hot; you understand. One day is as good as another. By the soul of Andrew Jackson I feel like shaking an archaic leg myself and tapping tuns of wine, and tripping it gayly on the greensward. I haven't had a square merrymaking these forty years. Gads, my old friend, we'll renew our youth and pack these perilous young responsibilities off in the narrow path of honour and offspring while the roses are in bloom."

It is astonishing, I said to myself, with what avidity philosophy worms itself into other persons' affairs. Here was my discreet old mentor thrown off his balance entirely by a prospect of orange blossoms, and ready to avail himself of the hal-

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lucinations of youth, to fasten two young persons irretrievably together for life.

I told him I would consult with one of the principals and talk further of it. But they kept the principal out of the way between them. Charlie and Miss Io had ridden up to the Club to make inquiries about the tournament. I imagined that he slipped out in the mornings before I was up, and lingered round somewhere all night till I had gone to bed. Some kind of film had come between us already.

In such an uneasy condition of mind, made restless by the conviction that I no longer had any determining voice in that which alone interested me, I felt an impulse to rush after my son and throw my arm about him with the old-time confidence and say, "Come, come, Comrade, our interests are identical — let us tear ourselves away from all this and recover our implicit candour born of so many hours of affection." The more I pondered over these intricacies of my own weaving the more vividly I remembered the spontaneity and motiveless vivacity of Polly, who had no purposes — only instincts.

I am afraid the Doctor's circle began to bore me a little. Madame Coldcream put my complacency to a severe test. I was kept at a continual pitch of decorous consideration by her well-bred platitudes and her unexceptionable artificiality. She had brought her groove with her, and one could not be polite without walking in it. The Doctor appeared to think it was a

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luxury to bounce about her with elephantine courtesy and practise some of his old social graces. But I had no vanity of hospitality to sustain, and when he carried them all off for a drive to show them the country, I begged out of the group and was left behind in the big, echoing house with the servants. Then it was that I seized a sombrero from the hat rack and, clutching a heavy cane, set out for the Lodge. I never before had been so destitute of a definite purpose. If you had asked me what I was going to the Lodge for, I should have looked at you with a vacuous ignorance worthy of a wax figure.

It is well, perhaps, that one does not at times know what he is about. He is thus enabled to stumble on providentially.

When I arrived within a stone's throw of the house, the plunk of a banjo came through the roses. The free, jocund stroke of its few strings called to me from very far back, and I kept step to it as I entered the enclosure and found Polly in the back yard sitting on an overturned wash-tub, one leg over the other, strumming some kind of barbaric stave.

Suddenly as I had come upon her, it did not surprise her. She might have been expecting me for all the change that my appearance made in her manner.

"Listen to this," she said. "I have been picking at it two days and I have just got it — snatched it like a bunch of marshmallows, down in the meadows where the boys play it to the cattle.

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“Wait awhile, my honey dear,
Summer time’s a-comin’;
When the snow is melted, suah
You’ll hear de bees a-hummin’.”

One makes quick estimates sometimes. I said to myself in one of those lightning calculations that astonish us afterwards, I know now was the matter with Miss Io and Madame Co-cream and Petunia herself—they have no business in their dispositions.

“Polly,” I said, looking round for another overturned tub and not finding it, “have you abandoned us? There is something atrocious in leaving us to our own resources at such a crisis.”

“Us?” repeated the minstrel, with an interrogative plunky-plunk. “Are you speaking of the company?”

“No,” I replied, tumbling at the first stroke to her own frankness, “only for myself.”

“There is something funny in a man of your resources coming to a church mouse. (Plunkety-plunk.) Listen to the second verse.”

“Wait a moment,” I said. “Aren’t you going to the tournament with the family?”

“Nobody axed me, sir, she said.” (Plunkety-plunk.)

“That explains why I am here.”

“To ask me?”

“Will you go with me?”

“Yes, with you.” (Plinkety-plink.)

She jumped up, ran to the door of the house

I BECOME A NONENTITY

placed the banjo inside, seized her chip hat, and, coming back, slipped her arm through mine.

"It was real good of you," she said, as we walked along. "I was afraid I had offended you."

"Well, Polly, I have turned it all over in my mind, and do my best I cannot find anything to be offended at—in you, at least. I have been a little disappointed, I suppose, but we get over those things."

"And you are recovered?"

"Somewhat. It is a man's duty to rectify mistakes when he cannot prevent them."

"You mean other persons' mistakes."

"No, I don't. I mean my own. Polly, I want you to tell me exactly how old you are."

"You can't correct that. I was twenty on the first of April. All Fool's day. You might have guessed it—I mean the day."

"True, if I had thought of sunshine and showers, which you take such good care to remind me of. But, after all, what have the years to do with it? Some girls are born women, and some men remain boys. You know we were so confidential at the start."

"Yes, at the start."

"Why shouldn't we be at the finish?"

She stopped short in the grassy road and looked at me with one of those quick, involuntary starts that were her own property and in which she always played the echo.

"Finish?" she said, with a soft, rose-tinted alarm. "My—what has happened?"

TANGLED UP IN BEULAH LAND

"You have," I replied, catching hold of and resuming the walk. "If you had been content to remain an uncertain danger, all would have been well. But you must happen *in propria persona* and muddle everything—even me."

"Walk along this path to the meadow," murmured. "I want you to see the Holsteins. When I am muddled, I come down here and look at the cows. Aren't you fond of cows?"

"Polly," I said, "you may be able to relieve my mind of a burden. I feel that my family has placed itself under some kind of obligation to you, and as a man of honour I think it ought to be redeemed, if not by one, why then by another member of the family. Has it ever occurred to you that Charlie may be too young to see it in that light?"

We had come to the heavy stile at the meadow and we both leaned upon it close together. The Holsteins dotted the green stretches with their white stomachers, and the long afternoon shadows reached across the fields in soft bars.

"You really feel sometimes," she said, "that you are younger than Charlie, don't you? That's what you mean by being muddled?"

"Would you mind telling me what *you* think?"

"I don't think there is so much difference between you as one ought to expect."

"Oh, yes, there is. I cannot do the same thing that Charlie does—at least, with his indifference. A young man never has so much consideration for other persons."

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While we were talking, the Holsteins that were scattered about the field began to move slowly, in converging lines, toward us, so slowly and softly that I did not notice it until they had drawn together at some little distance and were all pointing at Polly. I looked up and saw the absurd semicircle of beasts that had closed in upon us, as if indeed Polly carried her magnetism into the fields and all things came toward her.

"Wait," she said. "I have some salt in my pocket. You shall see them stick out their big, jolly tongues and lick my hand. Aren't they handsome, with their velvet belts and big agate eyes?"

They came so close that I could smell their minty breaths, — a warm, musky fragrance, picked up from daisied glades and gathered along wet, odorous paths, lush with medicinal shoots and blades of balsam. One or two of them tried to say something in their own absurdly inarticulate and mumbling way — a way that opened great coral caverns of mouths, and emitted soft rumbling interrogative moos, not unlike the summer rumble of the heavens after a hot, dry day, when you listen to the mooing in the far-off mountain.

Polly held out a little white hand, and they all came up in turn and kissed it, — beautiful, half-te obeisance, trying to contribute its homage from the nature of things; and she pulled their velvety ears and stroked their massive jowls, and

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had untranslatable words for each one, that belong to the mid-kingdom between instinct and reason.

I believe the influence of the honest kine man has affected me. Perhaps I tried myself to model my life on his. It is some time ago, and I cannot be accurate. I leaned close to my companion and said: —

"Polly, be frank with me — Charlie has hurt you."

She gave a little start, as if I had tried to open the lid of a forbidden casket. But her impulsiveness and frankness dominated her.

"Yes — a little," she said; "but it does not count now."

I pulled her a little closer.

"Yes, it does count," I insisted. "We are both hurt in the same way."

"Oh, no — not in the same way."

"Well, at least by the same act."

"No, no — you are unjust."

"He pretended to love you."

"Pretended? Dear me."

I held her fast, for I could feel her shrink from the subject.

"It must have been a pretence if it was so short-lived. Something or somebody interfered with it."

"Well?"

"Why do you say 'well.' It is not well."

"Isn't it?"

"Why, no. How can it be? Now he loves somebody else. It's Io, isn't it?"

"Oh, no, certainly not."

"What?"

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"It isn't Io."

"Then who, in the name of all the youthful follies, is it?"

"You."

"Try and be serious a moment. He cannot help that, and it is no great credit to one's flesh and blood. You understand that I am speaking of his recreancy to you."

"Yes. It was his fidelity to you. I rather admired it, it was so original. He couldn't love anybody unless you did."

"What imbecility! Do you mean to say that my son has never grown out of his infancy and has to ask his father what kind of emotion he shall experience?"

"Oh, his father stands first in his consideration. You don't know him."

"Polly, tell me honestly, did Charlie ask you if you could love him? Speak up. We want to understand each other."

She turned her head away and put her salty hand to her mouth, so that she answered through her fingers.

"He asked me if I thought I could love his Governor."

"Great Solomon, Polly, and what did you say?"

"I said I could try,—he had set me such a good example. And I did try."

She must have rubbed her salty hand across her eyes, for, as I pulled her face gently round, those violet eyes were swimming again. This

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was too much for me. I had no immediate words that were fitted to the occasion; so what should I do but pull her a little closer and kiss her, — thus being in some sort an acknowledgment to her as well as a comfort to myself, the cows looking complacently, as if it were part of the ordinance.

"I think we understand each other better," said, not quite understanding myself.

"Yes, and so we need not mention the subject again, for after all it isn't a matter of life and death. I should hate to imagine myself bereaved."

"You never shall. When a father sees his duty clearly, he always expects his son to perform it."

This was at last so exactly idiotic in its fitness to the occasion that one of the cattle smiled ponderously, which looked very much like a yawn; but Polly only said: —

"He always performed it, didn't he?"

"Yes, according to his changing lights. He may consider it his duty now to be a ninny."

"His duty to you?"

"Suppose we hurry back. I should like to give him some fresh pointers on what may be his duty to me."

"I am sure it would be more comfortable for everybody to let him find out for himself. Besides, it really isn't of so much importance."

Then we returned along the lane, Polly hanging to my arm with what I thought was a new confidence, and after some little argument she consented to accompany me to the Doctor's man-

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sion and undergo the ordeal of Mesdames Dewey's and Coldcream's inspection, an ordeal from which she did not flinch and of the success of which I, in my infatuation, had not the least doubt.

I recall that walk back from the meadow with a vivid memory. These incidental pictures remain longest in the mind and flash their colours with unfading brilliancy. Polly must have noticed that I held to her with a new zest, as if I had in some measure reclaimed her. I remember that there was a peculiar golden glow over the landscape, and I was bucolic enough to remark that it seemed to come through fresh cream. Polly only said, "If you don't mind, I'll take my banjo with me," and, as I had to carry it, we arrived at the Doctor's porch like two wandering minstrels, but received a boisterous reception.

It was well that I had brought her back, for that evening down came Mr. Fancher and two or three of his associates to pay their respects to the guests, and to make the old house ring with their merriment, in which the Doctor joined with a youthful zest that was amazing, and Polly with her banjo and her vivacity violated all forms and delighted everybody.

Madame Coldcream and I watched the young people from our corner, vainly endeavouring to read, between all the lines of merrymaking, some sober purposes that might be lurking there. But it was of no use. Charlie did not hesitate to rival Mr. Fancher in dancing attendance upon Io, and I could not see that Polly was at all distressed by

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it. When it grew late, and those of us whose stock of merriment was not large were prepared to leave the young folks to make a night of it, my sister caught me in the hallway.

"Rufus," she said, "you are entirely off your base." (My excellent sister occasionally sports terms.) "I wouldn't give that" (squeezing her fingers) "for your or the Doctor's concernment. You are a pair of most exemplary bats. I can't tell you now, for I have a splitting headache and must go to bed. It is too late to explain, but Nature does not need my assistance. These people get up in the morning at midnight, pagan hours and I must get a few winks of sleep. Good night."



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CHAPTER XI

THE TOURNAMENT AND WHAT CAME OF IT

IN the midst of preparation I alone lacked a merry heart. It was plain enough that any social event assumed undue proportions to the household, dependent for the most part upon themselves for festivity.

There was, I noticed, a slightly feverish air and an unusual activity on that morning of the tournament. The Doctor himself was not entirely free from excitement. He bounced in, shot his amiable imperatives, and bounced out. The breakfast, at a most unseemly hour, was hurried through as a matter of routine duty, and even Io, I thought, wore something like a suppressed flutter on her madonna face. The only person who preserved an observant composure, and insisted on taking all the time that propriety called for over her coffee, was my sister, and presently she and I

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found ourselves deserted at the table, not yet having finished our meal.

"Rufus," she said, "we must be getting old. Neither of us seems to be human enough to be disturbed."

"I am afraid," I said, "that with our experience we are apt to regard tournaments as a bore."

"Yes, undoubtedly; but it is part of woman's education to be bored patiently. I think, however, there is a surprise in store for you at this particular merrymaking."

"For me? I wish you would prepare me for it."

"That's just it. I am not in the secret. I can only suspect, and could not help overhearing a word or two."

"It is very annoying," I said, "that there should be secrets when there is no occasion for them."

"There wouldn't be any, Rufus, if there weren't men. A secret is merely a defect of vision."

"Now see here, Petunia," I said, with some irritation, "I have been very much disturbed by what I may call a complication, which is partly of my own making, and I don't think you ought to add any more weight to it than you can avoid. Just tell me plainly what it is you think will surprise me; perhaps, if it isn't an agreeable surprise, I may prevent or avoid it."

"That's it. It is never safe to tell you anything. You rush off at a parental tangent and make a fuss. Now if you will just remain cool

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and indifferent, as I do, and let things take their course, you can laugh at surprises. Nature will have its own way. The truth is a father who has a son old enough to crack stone should be inured to surprises."

"It seems to me that you are intimating as plainly as you can that it is my son who has a surprise for me."

"I am sure of it. The boy is in love, and you are bothering him. He is liable to do anything rash."

"I don't believe a word of it. He may be in love, and I think he is, but it does not at all follow that he will deceive me, and nothing else would surprise me. But to make sure of it, I will take the young bull by the horns."

As I got upon my feet with impulsive determination, Petunia imitated me, and took hold of my arm. But before she could say anything, the Doctor burst in upon us.

"Now, then, my excellent friends," he cried, "if we are to get away before the sun is unendurable, you really must come along."

"Where is that son of mine?" I asked, somewhat anxiously.

"That son of yours has been gone ten minutes. He and Io are in the saddle. The surrey is waiting for Mrs. Dewey, who is going under my protection, and the phaeton is there for you and Polly, as you desired. Heavenly smoke, man, go and hunt up Bob, and leave my guests to me."

Polly and I jogged along in the family phaeton

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after all the inmates of the house had set out with a compounded hurrah-boys air. It was early in the morning. The sun had not been up long enough to dispel the dew, and the shadows of the trees lay long and damp over the road. I could not recall that I had ridden at so early an hour for twenty years.

"Polly," I said, when we were seated side by side, "Charlie has avoided me for several days, I fancy. What do you suppose can be the reason?"

"I cannot, for the life of me, imagine," said Polly, "what any one should avoid you for. But then I haven't had as much of you as Charlie has."

"There is something on his mind and in his conduct that I do not understand. He hurried off with Miss Io before I could get a word with him."

"The Doctor hurried them off together. He is terribly brisk in the mornings. Mr. Charlie is all right."

"Do you really feel that way, Polly?"

"Oh, yes, I'm naturally of a generous disposition."

"What do persons do at these tournaments?"

"They sit on the balcony and watch the young men play polo, and then they eat a trout dinner, and call on the Doctor to make a speech. Then they have a dance, and flirt and gossip, and drive home in the moonlight. You'll enjoy it."

"Will you?"

"Certainly — if it's moonlight and you drive me back."

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"I mean the festival."

"Oh, yes, that's great fun in its way. The Club members will try to break their necks, and the old folks will look on, and Io will be perked up on a throne and not move a muscle if two of them are killed. She has a great deal of firmness."

"I fancy it will be something of a bore to me. I would rather sit down at the Swirl and talk to you."

"Oh, no, you will be surprised."

"Surprised? There you go. That is what Mrs. Dewey said. But you are confidential enough to forewarn me. What am I to be surprised at?"

"Well, then, you will be surprised at the company, first of all. There will be the homespun gentry and the city athletes. Then the dinner will surprise you; then, Io will be a surprise, and, last of all, HE will astonish you."

"These things do not appear to promise any surprises. You must remember that I am a somewhat blasé veteran."

"That's the reason it will surprise you — like a new salad. The young gentlemen of the Club are so far away from their city governors that they think they can let themselves loose in the woods."

"You have been to the annual tournament before."

"I missed it last year. I was in New York. But the year before I attended it. I'll tell you what they did. First, they had the joust on the lawn. Polo and hurdles and rough-riding. They picked up handkerchiefs (the ladies' handker-

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chiefs) at full gallop, and kept them as prizes; and Barclay Jennings was thrown and dislocated his shoulder; and Frank Buckley sprained his ankle and they had to carry them upstairs, and the Doctor took his coat off and operated — yes, he did. 'Now this is something like sport,' said HE. 'Get me warm water and bandages.' 'Bind it up with that handkerchief, Doctor,' says Frank Buckley, 'the one with the pink monogram on it.' 'Tush, tush, boys,' says the Doctor, 'we'll keep that for the next patient, who will probably dislocate his neck. You keep quiet or I will take your leg off. You know it was Io's handkerchief.'

"I should think that would have dampened the merriment."

"O dear, no — enhanced it. Io put on a white apron and played the nurse in spite of the Doctor, who ramped and stamped and said 'Holy smoke, girl, don't you do it. We'll have the whole Club dislocated.'"

And here Polly let off a little roulade of laughter like a small sky-rocket.

"Yes," I said, "I can understand that Io as a nurse is worth risking one's neck for."

"The Doctor said she was too ridiculous — let me see, what was it he did say — oh, yes, 'Great Scott,' says he, 'fancy a man with a sprained ankle who wants his temples bathed every ten minutes. Where's Bob?'"

Then I tried to execute a roulade of my own. I'm afraid I was not in very good voice.

"Is Mr. Fancher a rough rider?" I asked,

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feeling a little gleam of hope that perhaps he would be the surprise in store for me, and intended to risk his neck.

"I should think he must be," replied Polly. "You know he told the Doctor he intended to marry Io. That was rather desperate, wasn't it?"

"I should like to know what it was the Doctor really said to the proposition."

"Oh, I can tell you. HE said: 'Tush, tush, my son, you had better stick to your regular amusement and break your neck in some other comfortable way. I flatter myself I'm master of this paddock.' Did it ever occur to you that the Doctor is especially good at flattering himself?"

"Polly," I said quite seriously, "the Doctor has set his mind on marrying Io to Charlie. He has reasoned himself into a belief that it is a duty."

"Yes, dear old goose, you can't help feeling sorry for him."

"For Charlie, you mean."

"No, for the Doctor."

"You don't believe that Charlie will ever marry Io?" I asked, as I tightened on the reins and, without knowing it, stopped the horse in the road.

"Never," said Polly, with what I thought was a soft intensity. "What have you stopped for?"

"You must have taken my breath and the horse's at the same time. Get up, Periwinkle. Polly, if there is anybody to be sorry for, it is

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you. I should think you could see that Charlie like all the rest of them, has fallen down abject at Io's feet. He's bewitched."

She was looking straight ahead, and I could not see her telltale eyes, but I thought she shook her head with a slightly negative action, as if she had repeated to herself the word never. Whether it was resolution or faith in Charlie I could not tell, but in either case, it had only, for me, a tender solicitude. She was a confiding girl, after all, believing with a girl's innocence that a young man holds his vows sacred. How little she knew of the power of passion in the young man to blind the judgment and hide the consequences. And yet, the father instinct of me felt strangely touched by the fidelity of this girl, who, in spite of all, believed in Charlie, or pretended to.

"We shall never get to the tournament," she said, "if you do not drive faster."

"Bother the tournament," I replied. "It seems to me we have come to it. Polly, just listen to me a moment. You are strangely confident. I honour you for it, but I do not feel about it as you do, and I am going to ask you to do a strange thing."

"Wait a moment," she said. "Stop the horse. I want to gather some of those wild flowers," and out she jumped.

I watched her flitting in the grass and among the bushes, plucking the summer blooms that here and there come up with many colours along the stretch of damp meadow, and the unconscious grace of movement.

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tion and strong relief of her lithe figure against the shadowy wood filled me with new admiration. There was something about Polly, seen thus, that defied all analysis that I could command. Whenever I thought of her and Io with comparative intent as two pictures, it always seemed to me that one of them carried her own light and irradiated herself without knowing it. She possessed a human and fluctuant quality that fitted itself inimitably and instantly, like that little river, to whatever it touched. As she went lightly among the stems, she occasionally looked toward me, holding up a bunch of colours, but I saw only the glad smiling face, and it seemed to me that this was what Vernet and all those French romancers of old had been trying to realize. Presently she climbed back into the phaeton with her burden, and once bestowed, she said, in the most matter-of-fact way:—

"I interrupted you. You were going to say something and you looked solemn. Have you thought it over?"

"Polly," I said, "if you do not marry Charlie—will you marry me? It isn't so much of a pledge as a test."

She turned squarely round, held out her hand, and, without the least hesitation, replied promptly:—

"Yes, sir."

It came at me so plumply that I held her hand until she pulled it away, and being for a moment unable to make out the exact meaning of her

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promptitude, must have looked rather wonderingly sentimental. Nevertheless, my remaining good sense told me that it was simply a declaration on her part that she would never be called upon to marry me.

"Now, please whip up the horse," she said. "We must not think altogether of ourselves. There are others."

We arrived at the Club House about nine o'clock. A more romantic spot could not have been found than this broad plateau on the mountain side, with a torrent tumbling down within view, and a great campus stretching out under the ancestral trees in front, beyond which the misty perspectives of the valleys made spacious outlooks.

We were hailed from the crowded balcony with shouts of greeting, and Polly was carried off by a body-guard of athletic young men. I saw but little of her after that, save in flashes, and only heard of her in airy gurgles, blown to me from the wood, and always accompanied, I thought, by a chorus of acclamations.

The only distinguishing feature of such an affair as was this is the easy determination of everybody to leave as many of the conventionalities behind as is compatible with the association of ladies and gentlemen. The young men of the Club, in becoming hosts for one day, demanded and received the right to mingle some of the freedom of an outdoor camp with the amenities of a formal function. Even the dowagers and ve-

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erans who have to be present for protective reasons are supposed to relax a little of their vigilance in the wildwood, and their endeavour to do so on this occasion was to me one of the most amusing features of the gathering, and I saw with zest, before the day was over, the proper Madame Coldcream skipping in the grass with wide-awake hat on, and positively showing her autumnal ankles with something like mature abandonment.

How much a tournament costs these profligate young men I should not like to estimate. They had French cooks from Philadelphia and New York, and coloured waiters from the Hot Springs, to say nothing of the Hurrian band and exotic flowers. There were wine and cigars galore, and Roman punches handed round in tiny Dresden bowls, hired, I dare say, for the occasion. Then, too, they had assembled most of the landed gentry in the county, or at least that portion of them which had eligible daughters likely to be interested in the sports of the city gentlemen, and a variegated and interesting collection it made, reminding me more of Commencement Day at West Point than of any other tournament I had ever attended, minus, of course, those fetching gray coats and white trousers.

Polly had described the festivities with her usual accuracy. Most of the members had their hunters brought down, and there was an exhibition of high jumping and other reminiscences of the New York Horse Show, with a competing struggle for the handkerchief, which I, from her chair of state

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had given up, all of which elicited a good deal of hearty applause from the ladies and some criticism from the Doctor, who had served a term on the plains and was familiar with the feats of the cowboys. When it was over the guests and the club men paired off, and I saw Mr. Fancher carry away Lo on his arm, and caught a glimpse of Polly hanging to a stalwart beau.

I must have acted a little morosely, I suppose, straying off alone and trying to make up my mind. If, after all, it might not be an allowable arrangement to claim Polly for myself and let Charlie go his headlong way. I own that I had a growing inclination to retain Polly in my family, and it seemed to me at the moment that Polly had evinced no opposition to being retained one way or the other. The simple fact is Polly had grown by some inscrutable virtue of her own to be a very important consideration with me, and I confessed that I gave way to the ignoble thought for the moment, that perhaps it would be well to let Nature have her way with the three of us. Even fathers have their weak moments. Might it not be that Fate had reserved Polly for my mature rescuing? It would not be such a monstrous thing if the girl saw something in the father—better balanced and more reliable—than had won her in the son. I had gone so far as to make an unprecedented and conditional proposal to Polly, and the girl had accepted it promptly and frankly. For the life of me I could not make out, now that I thought it over, whether her acceptance was

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me or the result that was already guaranteed to her faith.

So it was that Polly, by baffling me, won me to an admiration that was beyond all reason. And so it always is with a man when he gets past his headlong stage. He begins to worship a supernal twitter that reminds him of his own youth. Against the chiselled Io, Polly seemed to throb and quiver and smile and weep as the tides of life went exultingly on.

Now this is all very well, but when a father of fifty with a son of twenty gets into this tangle, he has to deal with a new element, utterly unknown to the youthful lover who is foot-loose. The parental bonds are tight. He may play at the selfishness of passion, but he cannot get rid of the father's loyalty. I do not know which is the most craven, his admiration for that which is most admirable in a girl, or his sympathy for that which is most contemptible in his own offspring. It was plain enough to me that Charlie, like all the rest of them, was under the spell of Io. How could I help pitying him. Suppose she jilted him. Just think of that poor fellow being all smashed up at his age. And then I was responsible for most of it myself. What did the Doctor know of a father's feelings?

So I wandered about and smoked my cigar and watched the romp of exuberant nature, and tried to read for myself between the lines of flirtation. Do my best, I could not discover any surprises. There were some bouncing girls in the bowling

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alley — one of them had dropped a ball on his toes and was being fanned in a chair; another had made a ten-strike and fainted. There were other groups in the billiard room and on the croquet ground. It was all traditional, and familiar to the man who has been through it. But I noted that Mr. Fancher had appropriated Io, and fondly believed that my boy, like myself, was wandering about slightly disgruntled, not even caring to interfere with Barclay Jennings, who had carried off Polly. As for the Doctor, he had encountered Judge Gates of Mifflin, one of the staunchest of the old Quaker stock of Pennsylvania, with a large family of girls and boys, several of whom had come with him and were introduced as Pearl and Sapphira and Jasper, for, as the Doctor gallantly remarked, the Gates household had as many shining portals as the Holy City. With this staunch old gentleman, the Doctor entered into an argument on protection and free trade, to the delectation of a small group of ancients, and the consequence was that the young folks had everything their own way, and everything seemed to gallop or dawdle in the familiar and preordained route. The dinner was quite an achievement of its kind, with mountains of wild berries and trout in various modes. There were appropriate wines and confections, and Mr. Fancher was master of ceremonies. He had put Io at the end of the table, and had a wreath of white roses suspended above her head like a halo. He took good care to have the seat

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next to her, and to have my son pushed down to the other end among the reverend seniors, where he was compelled to listen to the Pearl Gates opening and shutting. I think Mr. Fancher managed to say to the Doctor in this arrangement, without any words, that at this banquet his worthy guest was not quite master of the paddock. So there was some good-natured cut and thrust between them which amused the rest of us, though the wit was not remarkable. When the Doctor asked what the thing was above Miss Io's head, Mr. Fancher replied that it was a reminder that she was not under a cloud for one day. It was a crown. Whereupon the young men applauded, and Io did not even blush, though the Doctor called upon her vehemently to do so for the sake of her sex, and Polly tartly volunteered to do it for her.

With such exhilaration as the dinner afforded, they gathered on the lawn, and with the Hungarian band well disposed, danced the hours away until the moon was up.

As I sat on the balcony with "Mother" and Madame Coldcream, watching the figures, and remarking that Polly was the best dancer in the party, the Doctor came up, and touching me on the shoulder, drew me away from the group.

"What do you suppose has become of Io?" he whispered. "She and Fancher have not been seen for an hour, and these runagates are too mad to miss anything."

"They are probably wandering about in the

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moonlight somewhere," I replied. "I saw them this afternoon in a shady dell holding each other's hands."

"Confound that fellow," said the Doctor. "I don't want to mar this merrymaking, but I suppose I must give him a piece of my mind. Don't worry the old lady about it — I'll find out."

And he strode off. I heard afterward that he went down among the dancing groups to make inquiries, and catching Barclay Jennings between whirls, he asked, "What has become of Fancher?" and Jennings, keeping time with one leg, and speaking in puffs, said: —

"Fancher? Why, Fancher, he's gone to New York. Now, then, Miss Polly, there's the waltz."

The Doctor took out his big red handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He waited for a few moments to catch Jennings again, and this time he caught him by the arm.

"Look here, young man, one of my family, Miss Io, has not been seen for an hour. I'm a little anxious about her."

"Miss Io?" says Jennings, beating time with his hand, "oh, she's all right. She's gone to New York too. You see I was to go with them as best man, but I got tangled up in this dance, and they were in such a confounded hurry —" and then Jennings was swept away in the waves of motion.

The Doctor has what is called a level head. He took in the matter at one gulp, and sup-

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pressed himself with admirable will, for he perfectly well understood that Fancher in such an escapade would have the sympathy of the Club, if indeed the Club had not been his fellow-conspirators.

He looked at his watch. The through train did not pass Tuskaloo for an hour. He could get there in time, and make such a row that the valiant Mr. Fancher would back away from the indignant brawn of Tuskaloo. Besides, he would take Boylston with him, and Boylston had once broken a man's back.

This was all very natural, and very like the Doctor, who in an emergency was a very cool and determined man. But when he got back to the balcony, carrying his Panama in his hand, and still mopping his forehead, he encountered "Mother" and me, we having withdrawn from the group, and "Mother" handed him a note that had just reached her. She pressed her two fingers on her lips as he read it, rather, I thought, to suppress him this time than herself. It was very simple and direct. All it said was:—

"Don't worry about me—Married at Tuskaloo—Will telegraph from New York. Io."

The Doctor looked crestfallen rather than grim.

"Don't discuss the matter here," he said. "A misfortune is bad enough, but to have it turned into a joke is worse. We'll get away, if you don't mind, as soon as possible. Just find our people and I'll order the teams."

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In such a dénouement my first thought was of Charlie. How would he take this blow? I sighed for him. This was his first shock in life. He had never had any disappointments. His poor young heart would probably feel very dismal, and life, for a time at least, would not be worth living. I must find him at once, and, like a true father, come to his assistance and brace him up.

That Hungarian band was getting infernal. I went down and hunted for him through the galloping coterie. When I caught him with an affectionate but firm grasp, I said:—

“My boy, something has happened. Prepare yourself for a great shock.”

He was blowing like a porpoise.

“What is it?” he said—“Madame Cold-cream had a paralytic stroke?”

“Miss Io has eloped with Mr. Fancher.”

He was not looking at me at all. His eyes were going up and down with the music and the figures.

“Yes,” he said, “I heard of it. Wait a moment, Dad, till I finish this dance, and I’ll be with you. Polly is engaged to me for this set.”

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CHAPTER XII

POLLY UNTANGLES

THE morning after this unexpected and unpardonable escapade of Io's broke rainy and leaden. I must have overslept myself owing to the sombre light of my chamber. I stood at my open window and listened to the rain. It was pattering with steady persistency on the rose vines and running in rivulets from the porches. It was one of those summer rains that come now and then in June and July and that have a reminder of April and a presage of September in them----something passed and something chilly approaching. I looked into the adjoining chamber. It was empty. Then I proceeded to attire myself in the most disconnected manner, sitting on the edge of the bed with one shoe on my foot and the other in my

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hand — listening to the rain and trying to recall what it was I said to Polly in the phaeton.

These summer rains that borrow the melancholy of October and pour it steadily for hours out of unlit skies have an occult retroactive effect. They suggest a chilliness that does not exist. They make you huddle and remember. You light wood fires in the large rooms, but they burn pallidly and spit reproachfully, — like things born out of season, — and your convivial circle falls into commonplaces of impatience and supposes "this has set in for a week," and, being in the country, thinks of the roads.

However, the weather is often singularly apropos, and at this time it was only trying to supplement the chill that had settled on the group in the Doctor's establishment. I could hear a monotone of voices in the room beneath, and I learned when I came downstairs that *He* and Mother were having it out behind locked doors. A slight oscillation suggested the Doctor was walking the floor, and a lack of femininity in the tones implied that Mother had her fingers on her lips.

No coffee in the hall. I looked at the bare little table and wondered if it was intentional or accidental. I tried the porch. The rain blew in upon it, and when I turned the corner a wet blast smote me and I buttoned up my coat. The prospect was shivery and dripping. Recreant Nature that had been saying for so many days, "When you get tired of each other come out here to me — I have zithers and tabernacles and companion-

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ship" — now seemed to wear a vindictive spite and say, "Fall back on your humanities, you miserable, overweening mortals!"

It is at such times that the overweening mortals have a fine opportunity to snap their fingers in the face of Nature and laugh at its storied caprices, and mortals now and then avail themselves of it with all the exuberant authority of Lords and Masters. We all remember hours when Boreas only incited us to defiant revelry. We have, most of us, been shut up by the weather at some time in big, rambling, isolated houses where we were besieged by storms. And what a jolly contemptuous defence we made of it. How we heaped up the logs and laughed through the frosty panes at the snow-drifts and the cohorts of winter. What games we played, what forfeits we paid and exacted. We never heard the shriek of the wind, or, if we did, it only spurred our merry-making. What a shame it is that we lose our power of resistance as we get wiser.

But the breakfast? Oh, yes, we assembled at the breakfast table. But we seemed to have made a tacit agreement to preserve the relations of guests and host and not disturb any family secrets. It was evident that the Doctor and Mother had assumed an extra air of polite formality. They spoke rather elaborately about the weather, and the Doctor seemed to think it was a subject that we ought to consider specially interesting.

There was Io's empty chair on one side and Polly's on the other. Charlie came in a little out

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of breath, made an apology for keeping us waiting and sat down next to one of the empty chairs and took up the theme of the weather as if I had been cramming for it. How my volubly and thoroughly feminine half-sister managed to hold herself to the prohibitory reticences of that fast, I do not know. But women measure the social atmosphere with inscrutable nicety, and Madame Coldcream spoke of the necessity of hurrying back to New York with as cool a determination of a change in the weather as if there had been a bankruptcy in the family, to which the fact that they regretted that their engagements were such that they could not stay, such weather was enough to drive even a philosopher to the city. Charles looked up at me, as if he expected me to go and comfort the ladies. But I was not giving special heed to the drift of commonplace, and so the breakfast talk came to an end, and everybody had a disposition to get off where nobody would interfere with the individual glumness. Nevertheless I seized my formidable half-sister by the arm, just as she was gathering her skirts for an exit up the stairs.

"Petunia," I said, "come into the parlor for a moment, there is no good reason why you and I should congeal."

"Congeal," she repeated, dropping her skirts. "I feel as if I were in a refrigerator. Your friend regards me as a traitor in the bosom of his family—and the worst of it is, I suppose I am."

"Nonsense. He is generally disgruntled. He will get over it in a day or two."

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"Are you going to stay and wait for it?" she asked.

"I am not going to do anything rash. Let me advise you to wait till the weather changes, and not rush off in this storm."

We walked into the parlour and stood at one of the windows, looking unobservantly out at the steady downpour.

"You see," she said, "the Doctor suspects me of having a hand in this folly of Io's. But he does me a great injustice. I had only a finger in it. There, there! do keep quiet a moment if you want me to tell you. I had an inkling of Mr. Fancher's infatuation, and as I thought your duckling might be similarly ensnared I thought I'd run down here and if necessary throw my weight in with your son's. It took me just about half an hour to understand that Charlie was not in the race, and so I kept my mouth shut and let Nature take its course, but I did not suppose that the maiden would go flying off like a lunatic after that picnic. Let me tell you that it is a precious good thing that Fancher's got her and your son has not. You had better pack your satchel and come back with me, now that the farce is ended. I must go and change my dress. Do you know anything about that three o'clock train? — perhaps you think by staying here there will be another elopement — men get morbid by letting their minds dwell on these things."

"You must not go off on that three o'clock way-train. Wait till morning, there's a through

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express stops for water at ten. I must straighten out matters with the Doctor. If I fail, I'll go with you in the morning."

My efforts to patch up matters did not begin promisingly. My sister did not like the idea of staying over another night, and she hurried off to change her dress. I called her back.

"If you would not be in such a fussy hurry," I said, "I might be induced to go with you. Why not listen to me?"

"I cannot imagine what there is to listen to," she replied. "I am anxious to get back. You are not."

"How do you know? I am beginning to feel uncomfortable here. The Doctor is sore at what has happened and thinks Charlie and I could have prevented it. Charlie half suspects that I want to go back on Madame Coldcream's account. Mother is piqued because she thinks I tried to interfere with her scheme. Polly believes that the Doctor and I wanted Charlie to marry Iona and you think I am a fool for interfering with Charlie's infatuation in New York. You see I have much more reason to clear out than you have, but I preserve my equanimity and look at matters calmly."

"Yes, considering that you have fallen in love with Polly yourself, you *do* preserve a certain air of indifference."

"Oh, come now —"

"It is as plain as a pike staff, whatever that is. I don't wonder the Doctor expected you to use

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your parental influence in marrying off your son to Io. I should think you would feel rather cheap about it after all you said to me in New York of your son's folly. You do, don't you, when Charlie is about? I notice you are not much together."

This speech nettled me—perhaps on account of the truth in it.

"Oh, if you feel that way about the matter," I said, "perhaps the less we say about it the better. If it hadn't been for your mischievous suggestion about Madame Coldcream, Charlie and I would have retained our confidence in each other to the end."

"Had you taken my suggestion," replied Petunia, "your son could not have helped himself."

"True, we should have both been helpless."

Then she went up the stairs.

How it did rain! I poked about in the empty rooms aimlessly. Everything in the old house seemed to have quit business. There was an open book on the library table beside the big chair. "Howitt's Cranberry Culture." Faugh! It sounded marshy and wet. I sat down and let my thoughts wander off to the comfortable Club in the city. While I sat there the Doctor came in, and seeing me, shut the library door. He looked so much like a bull that I could not help taking him by the horns, as it were.

"You are pretty badly smashed up by this business, Doctor," I said.

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He took out his bandanna and wiped the rain from his face.

"If there is anything that I have set great store on all my life," he said, "it is honesty and fair dealing among friends."

"True, in that we are one," I replied encouragingly.

"Not at all! Not at all!" and he began fumbling in his breast pocket for the letter I wrote him from New York.

I held up my hand.

"Why go back to that," I said. "Let us deal with the present. I am as completely taken aback by what has occurred as you are."

"You speak as if some one had deceived you too."

"If any one has deceived you, Doctor, it was not me. I am surprised at your imputation."

"There's your letter," he replied, throwing it on the table. "You had better refresh your mind."

"About what?"

"See here, my old friend," he said, "if you think you have treated me with exact fairness, I am not going to disturb your conviction. We can at least disagree about some things without forgetting our present relations as host and guest."

I felt my cheek burn a little as I got up and we stood facing each other across the table.

"Doctor," I exclaimed impulsively, "our relations as guest and host need not interfere

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with the expression of our opinions of each other. The relations can cease from this moment if you desire more latitude of suspicion."

"My share of the relation forbids me to reply in kind," he said. "You are in my house."

"Perhaps that is unfortunate, but it is not irremediable. I beg your pardon, but nothing is easier than to readjust our relations if it will give you a better command of language."

Then I took two steps toward the door and came face to face with Charlie.

"Ah, there you are, my boy," I said. "Just in time, we go back at three. Get your things together."

He looked from me to the Doctor who had walked to the window and was examining the barometer with his back towards us.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"We have forfeited the Doctor's respect because we let Mr. Fancher carry off Miss Io."

"Pardon me," said the Doctor, turning round.

"Do you think that is a fair explanation?"

"I think it is accurate," I replied.

"It isn't anything of the sort. Charlie, my boy," he said, striding over and putting his hand on my son's shoulder, "I had great hopes of you. I didn't think that you would permit yourself to be beaten in a game of this kind."

Charlie hung his head a little.

"Speak up," I said. "What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know," said Charlie, "unless it is

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that I am one of those fellows who do not know when they are beaten."

"Well, if you do not know it by this time you never will, and I give you up. Between the lot of you I must look like a consummate old guy. But I deserve it. I deserve it for meddling with such tomfoolery at my age."

Then the Doctor went over and looked at the barometer again with his back toward us, and I really believe the old savage was affected. It is astonishing how much pathos a man can put into his back. For a moment I felt sorry for the Doctor who, having lost a choice piece of bric-a-brac, must look bereaved even in the rear. I could imagine how a man must suffer who is robbed of a Fortuny that has gladdened him for years. It was not the moment to speak to him about carrying off his remaining picture.

"Doctor," I said, "it is very unfortunate that you and I should allow a misunderstanding of so trivial a nature to strain the friendship of years."

"Trivial!" he exclaimed. "Confound it, sir, it goes to my marrow. A man at my age doesn't like to be made a monkey of. I told you why I had set my mind on this thing, and was weak enough to believe that you understood my position in the matter."

"I believe I did."

"See here!" he shouted. "You ought to know that what I was trying to do was to keep together a little group that I had gathered about me in my decline. It was the only thing I had

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to live for down here. A man hates to see his work all go to pieces when he takes his hand off. Confound that ungrateful baggage — after all I have done for her. Gentlemen, I feel as if I had lost a leg. I should think you would have some sympathy for me."

At that moment the sun broke out and came in a deep yellow shaft through the bay window. Everything outside sparkled and danced in prismatic splendour. And then, as if it were part of it, came the voice of Polly — that same roulading exultation. We looked at each other a second, and the Doctor opened the sash.

"You have Polly, Doctor," I said.

"Have I?" he snapped. "How long will I have her, do you suppose? How long will I have anything?"

"Call her in and ask her," said Charlie, with appropriate imbecility.

She must have glittered into view, for we heard her say, "Come out on the gravel, there's a rainbow."

"You come in here, you infatuated treetoad, I want to chain you down," cried the Doctor, and a moment later she appeared at the door, looking as if she had brought the rainbow with her. She gave one quick look at the solemn trio, let out a gurgle, and then clapping her hand on her mouth tried to look solemn like the rest of us.

"Polly," I said, jumping into the breach, "the Doctor has lost one of his girls, and he wants to feel assured that he will not lose the other."

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"Oh, the other doesn't count," said Polly, demurely.

"None of your twitters," cried the Doctor.

"Pardon me, Doctor," I said. "This goes to my marrow. Pray be serious. I had the privilege of asking this young lady if, in a certain contingency, she would be my wife. Her reply was remarkable."

"It couldn't be as remarkable as the question," said the Doctor.

"Why not? Her answer was, 'Yes, sir.'"

"It was quite safe. He knew I was engaged already," simpered Polly.

"Engaged, were you, already!" snorted the Doctor — "and under my very eyes?"

"Yes, sir," replied Polly, hanging her head. "I couldn't marry both of them. He must have known that, and besides" — said the minx, dropping her head lower and looking out of the corner of her eye at Charlie — "either one would do."

"You see, Doctor," said Charlie, "I couldn't help myself when it was a question of saving my Dad. I promised his sister, my aunt, to look after him down here."

"That's all you want of me, isn't it?" asked Polly, edging off toward the door.

"Come back here, you inscrutable jack-o'-lantern!" shouted the Doctor. "So you are going to marry Charlie, are you?"

"Either Charlie or his father," said Polly, putting her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the

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prospect. "Why not let them settle it between them?"

"Very well," ejaculated the Doctor, sitting down helplessly. "Go it. Clear out, all of you, and leave me to my dogs. Here, come here, you twittering ingrate" — and he pulled out a drawer of his writing table — "here, take these with you, I bought them for 10," and he pulled out two or three little boxes.

She floated over somehow and got her arm round the old man's neck.

"I am not going away. Nobody's going away. Everybody's going to stay, till it's over — and I'm going to stay after it is — for keeps. You can't drive me out."

"Nor me," said Charlie.

I took a full breath. "Nor me," I added quite resolutely.

The Doctor looked a little baffled and helpless for the first time in his life, so I went over and extended my hand.

"Old friend," I said, "there's one comfort left to us. If we cannot be fathers again at our age, let us be father's-in-law. What do you say?"

"Say yes," whispered Polly in his ear.

He gave me his hand.

"Wait a moment," cried Polly. "I'll go up and stop the packing."

And she did. We all stayed.

Charlie is staying there yet. He is raising cranberries.

